The Academic
International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

An Online Peer Reviewed / Refereed Journal
Volume 4 | Issue 10 | October 2026
ISSN: 2583-973X (Online), SJIF IF(2026): 5.6
Website: www.theacademic.in

Distracted to Delayed:Exploring Digital Distraction and Academic Procrastination among Undergraduate Students

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DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24393073

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Received: 25-10-2026

Accepted: 01-11-2026

Published: 20-11-2026

Keywords:

Digital Distraction, Academic procrastination, Smartphone use, Undergraduate students.

ABSTRACT

Have you ever sat down to study but ended up checking your phone, scrolling through social media or watching online videos instead? Digital distraction has become a common part of students' daily life. It makes it hard for students to stay focussed on their academic work and complete tasks on time (Troll et al., 2021). The present study aimed to discern the relationship between digital distraction and academic procrastination among undergraduate students. A quantitative research design was used and the study included 100 undergraduate students aged between 18 to 23 years who were included through purposive sampling. Participants completed the Smartphone Distraction Scale developed by Throuvala et al,2021 and Academic Procrastination Scale developed by McCloskey,2015.The results indicated a significantly high positive relation between digital distraction and academic procrastination ($r = .74$, $p<.001$) indicating that the students who reported being more distracted by digital activities also tend to report greater delays in completing their academic work. At the same time, the results do not show that digital distraction directly causes procrastination because the study only examines the relation between two variables. Other factors such as motivation, time, management, self control, and other study

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habits may also influence their behaviour and a wider study becomes more feasible in this case. Higher digital distraction is significantly associated with greater academic procrastination, highlighting the importance of managing digital activities to help students stay focused on academic tasks and complete them on time.

Introduction

In today's digital world, smartphones, social media, and other online platforms have become an important part of students' everyday life. These technologies provide useful resources for learning, but on the other hand it has become a major source of distraction that makes students delay or avoid their academic task, resulting in Berdik,(2018) characterised digital distraction as the tendency of students to lose or shift their attention from academic tasks due to use of digital devices and engagement with activities such as social media messaging, notification and online content. Tiwari and Bhadoria(2025) defined academic procrastination as the voluntary delay of an intended academic task, despite expecting that the delay will result in negative consequences.

A study was conducted by Jin et al.(2024) on the relationship between smartphone distraction, academic procrastination, anxiety, and time management disposition. This study found that smartphone distraction could predict increased levels of academic procrastination which could then lead to higher academic anxiety. However, the predicting effects in the mediation model, could fluctuate across individuals with different time management dispositions.Similarly, Hazra and Kant (2024) they did a study on academic procrastination among digital natives, focusing particularly on the role of digital distraction, such as social media and online entertainment. The findings showed that digital distractions contributed to task avoidance and procrastination, while psychological factors such as anxiety, perfectionism and fear of failure also played a role. This study suggested that time management, digital wellness, stress management and psychological support can help students manage procrastination. In addition, Alijarrah et al.(2025) conducted research that studied the relationship between social networking site use (SNS) and academic procrastination among 350 university students. The finding showed a significant positive relation between SNS use and academic procrastination, with SNS addiction emerging as the strongest predictor. This study concluded that excessive social media use and distraction can negatively affect students' academic productivity. Further, Acaray (2026) conducted research on how excessive use of these digital applications is associated with increased stress and potentially adverse outcomes related to academic achievements. This study examines the effect of digital stress and procrastination and psychological well-being and whether ego

depletion played a mediating role in this relationship. It was found that the students are negatively affected by digital stress. Digital stress, increased ego depletion which delays the fulfilment of important academic responsibilities. Ego depression acts as a mediating factor, meaning that digital distress can reduce student self-control resources, which can subsequently contribute to delaying academic tasks. Likewise, Phi et al.(2026) studied the influence of digital entertainment on academic procrastination among 839 Vietnamese University students. The study found that social media and online video use and encourage students to use AI and search tools which, despite making academic tasks easier, could also increase dependence on digital technology and lead to procrastination. In another study Wagma Iqbal et al.(2026) The focus of the study is the measurement of digital dependence in assessment of the relationship of digital dependency with procrastination and academic engagement of university students. The study found the relationship of digital dependence and procrastination and academic engagement. Participants of the study showed that a high-level of digital dependence was related to high-level procrastination. Study found the relationship of digital dependence with a positive level academic engagement.

Over the years research has shown that digital distractions like smartphones, scrolling through social media, watching online videos and spending time on internet platforms can affect students ability to concentrate on their studies. These distractions may cause students to put their academic work aside. Although researchers have studied this issue,many studies have also included other factors such as anxiety, stress, time management, and self control. But there is still a need to understand more clearly how digital distraction itself is related to academic procrastination as the focus was not broadly on social distraction on academic procrastination. Therefore, the present study is specifically focused on understanding how digital distraction is linked with academic procrastination among undergraduate students.

Method

The present study aimed to examine the relation between digital distraction and academic procrastination among undergraduate students.

Sample

The sample for the study consisted of 100 undergraduate students, aged between 18 to 23 years. And the sampling technique used was a non-probability method, purposive sampling.

Inclusion criteria

Individuals were included in the study who fulfilled the age criteria between 18 to 23 years. Who were undergraduate college students.All genders were included.

Exclusion criteria

Individuals were excluded from the study who were below 18 or above 23 years of age. Individuals who reported having a psychological or neurological disorder were also excluded from the study.

Measures/ Instruments

The participants were asked to complete two standardised self report questionnaire

The Academic Procrastination Scale (APS) It was developed by McCloskey to assess the level of academic procrastination among university students. It is a 25-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure student delays on academic tasks like exams, projects, and term papers.Uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).Total scores range from 25 to 125 (or up to 150 depending on specific adaptations), where higher scores indicate a higher degree of academic procrastination.It evaluates behaviors using items covering time management, distractions, personal initiative, and task avoidance.Its reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, which was found to be 0.76, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The Smartphone Distraction Scale (SDS) It was developed by Throuvala et al. to measure the extent to which smartphone can cause distraction in every life, the scale consist of 16 items divided into four dimensions, attention impulsiveness, online vigilance, multitasking and emotion regulation with four items in each dimensions. It uses a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1= Almost never and 5= Almost always, and higher score indicates greater smartphone distraction, the SDS demonstrated good reliability with an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. The scale is suitable for assessing smartphone related digital distraction among undergraduate students.

Research design

The present study employed a quantitative, correlation research design to examine the impact of social distraction on academic procrastination among undergraduate students.

Procedure

Participants aged 18 to 23 years who met the inclusion criteria were approached to take part in the study. Data was collected using google forms.They were informed about the purpose of the research and

that their participation is voluntary. They were also assured that the information provided by them would be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. After obtaining their consent, they were asked to complete the Academic Procrastination Scale(APS) and the Smartphone Distraction Scale(SDS). The questionnaires were completed individually with clear instructions provided to ensure that participants understood how to respond. After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation.

Analysis

The collected data were entered and analysed using the statistical package of social science (SPSS) version 25.0

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for study variables

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2
Digital Distraction	100	53.37	13.76	—	
Academic Procrastination	100	87.00	16.86	.74**	—

**p<.001

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the impact of digital distraction on academic procrastination among undergraduate students. The sample consisted of 100 participants. The results showed a high positive correlation between the two variables with "Pearson correlation coefficient of r= .74" which was statistically significant at $p < .001$. The mean score of digital distraction was 53.37 (SD= 13.73) and the mean score for academic procrastination was 87.00 (SD=16.86) which means that students who reported high levels of digital distraction also tend to report high levels of academic procrastination.

The strength of the correlation indicates that the relationship between the two variables was high. Therefore, the findings suggest that digital distraction and academic procrastination are positively associated

among undergraduate students. The study used a correlation analysis, so it is important to know that the result showed association between the two variables rather than proving that digital distraction causes academic procrastination, or that one variable directly leads to the changes of another.

The present findings are similar to the findings reported by Jin et al.(2024) who found that smart phone distraction predicted high-level of academic procrastination which was further associated with academic anxiety. Similarly Alijarrah et al. (2025)found a significant positive relationship between social networking site(SNS) use and procrastination among undergraduate students. Their study found that excessive social media use was strongly related to procrastination. These findings are generally in line with the present study and suggest that getting distracted digitally leads to more delay to their academic task. Interestingly, on the other hand another findings were reported in the Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology by Nwosu et al.(2020) which was examining social media use and academic procrastination among undergraduates. It was found that social media use did not have a significantly direct effect on procrastination, although an indirect relationship was observed through problematic internet use. So this differs from the previous study in which there was a strong positive relationship between digital distraction with academic procrastination.

There were some limitations that should be considered while interpreting the present findings. Firstly, the study was conducted with the sample of 100 participants, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to larger populations. In addition to this the study used correlational design, so it cannot be stated that academic procrastination is caused by digital distraction.Instead, there can be other factors which are indirectly being influenced, that can include less management skills, motivation, self control or study habits . The use of set measures may also influence the responses as participants may not always report their behaviour completely accurate . Despite these limitations, the findings are a useful application for understanding that students' academic behaviour.The result shows that digital distraction is an important factor to consider while studying procrastination, but by helping students becoming more aware of their digital habits, limit unnecessary phone use and develop effective time management strategies may support better academic functioning.

Conclusion

The findings for the present study indicates that digital distraction is highly associated with procrastination among undergraduate students.Which means students who experience greater distractions from smart phone or other digital activities are more likely to delay their academic task that could lead to procrastination. However, the relationship does not show that digital distraction directly causes procrastination. However,

the study uses correlational design, so other factors such as students' motivation , ability to manage their time, self-control or study habits might be playing an important role in delaying a task.

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