

SOCIAL MEDIA DISTRACTION AND TECHNO-STRESS AS PREDICTORS OF SOCIAL INCIVILITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The current research analysed the correlation between social media distraction, techno-stress, and social incivility amongst university students in Pakistan. As the use of technology in the day-to-day life continues to increase, social and academic behavior of students are being influenced more and more by the digital interactions. The sample size used was 343 students of the university, gathered using a structured questionnaire on the basis of the quantitative correlational design. Pearson correlation analysis indicated that, social media distraction results in significant positive correlation with social incivility $r = .61$ and techno-stress and social incivility $r = .57$. The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that social media distraction, techno-stress had a significant predictive ability on social incivility, thus explaining 42% of $R^2 = 42$. The results indicate that the excessive application of digital formats increases stress rates and has a negative impact on the development of uncivil behaviors among college students. The analysis highlights the importance of institutional measures that facilitate the promotion of online and academic interactions through digital well-being, emotions regulation, and respect. These findings add to the emerging knowledge of psychosocial effects of technology application to the process of higher education in the Pakistani setting.

Keywords: Techno-Stress, Social Media Distraction, Students, Pakistan

Introduction

The life in a university is an important period of transition which involves various academic, social and emotional difficulties related to adjustment and well-being of students (Tao et al., 2000). The spread of technology and the proliferation of social

media platforms which have become more digitized due to higher education has resulted in the establishment of new psychosocial processes among university students (Shahzadi & Toor, 2025). Despite the positive communication and learning effects caused by technology, there are also new behavioral issues like social incivility, techno-stress, and social media distraction (Debly, 2022). These aspects have emerged as acute concerns in the context of the university setting whereby too much online engagement may lead to loss of focus among students, high level of tension among students and loss of effective communication (Gall et al., 2011).

Almost 89 per cent of adult persons between the ages of 16–24 use social media platforms globally, and 45 per cent of them are online virtually all the time (Debly, 2022). In Pakistan, students in the university, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, are taking over communication and sharing information through social networking applications; about 90 percent of typical university students are taking advantage of this opportunity. But this has been accompanied by academic distraction, lack of control and lower levels of social cohesion. The digital presence between academic and personal space is becoming more unaltered, leading to heightened stress and lack of proper etiquette (Longobardi et al., 2016).

The culture of respect, which is the cornerstone of the learning environments, is destroyed by social incivility or rudeness, discourteous or disruptive attitude to the other people (Morrisette, 2001). It has been reported by faculty and researchers that there have been increasing rates of inter-personal disrespect and hostility in universities, among the populations (Levine and Cureton, 1998; Vuolo, 2018). Although trivially minor, in the long run, they lead to the creation of a poisonous climate that adversely impacts learning, mental health, and institutional climate (Raskauskas and Skrabec, 2011). According to former studies, the habits of impoliteness in classroom, incongruent interactions, blocking out, and opposing examples are thematic and growing because of habits of digital application by students (Nordstrom et al., 2009).

One of the major causes of such dynamics is the so-called techno-stress that is the psychological burden as a consequence of the inability to cope with technological requirements (Tarafdar et al., 2010). Techno-stressed students tend to complain of anxiety and mental overload and compressed social performance (Juškaitė, 2017; Hwang and Cha, 2018). On the same note, social media distraction as the well-defined phenomenon of being incapable of staying concentrated because of the frequent warnings and other online activities (Ryan et al., 2017) has been associated with a decline in academic performance, attention deficits and emotional burnout (Feng et al., 2019). Although the focus on understanding the relationship between distracting behavior on social media and techno-stress, and social incivility is widely discussed internationally, few studies have been conducted in Pakistan. The importance of understanding these relationships is to discover psychosocial risks related to digital dependency in school-related areas. This gap is the intended purpose of the current study since it will investigate how social media distraction and techno-stress are predictors of social incivility among Pakistani university students. It also aims to enlighten interventions, which foster healthy technological involvements, computer equilibrium, and civilized communication.

Rude behavior, classroom misbehaviour and disrespect towards your peers or the

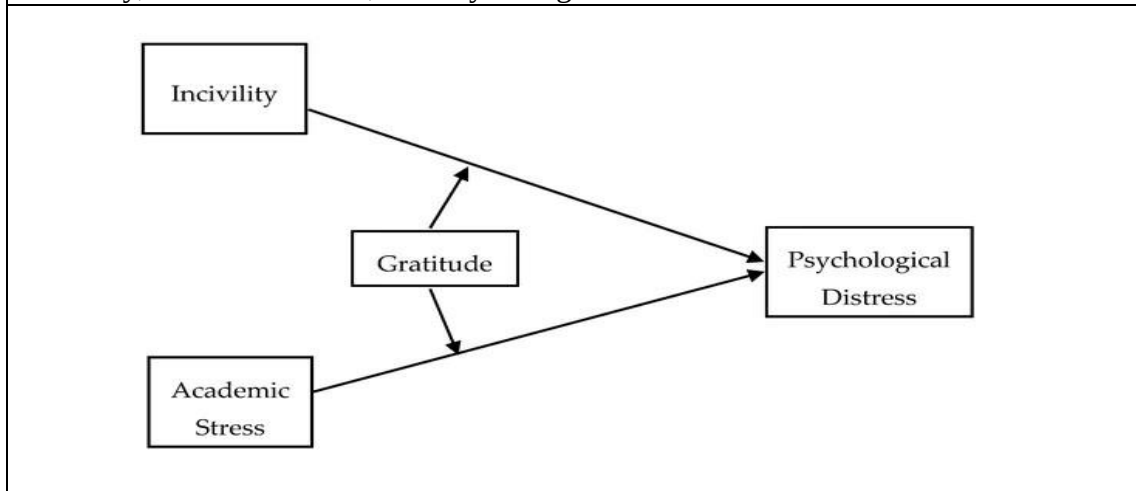
instructor are some of the behaviors (Morrisette, 2001). Other studies have already indicated that incivility endangers the integrity of educational settings and impairs the learning outcomes (Longobardi et al., 2016). Faculty is also commonly complaining of difficulties in attaining engagement and discipline due to the growing popularity of disrespectful conduct (Vuolo, 2018). In addition, incivility does not only interfere with classroom interactions but it can also harm the sense of belonging and cooperation around which academic communities are built (Raskauskas and Skrabec, 2011). This has been witnessed by a number of studies carried out on universities across the globe since social norms and institutional culture are considered crucial factors that influence civility in higher education (Boice, 1996; Khan et al., 2022).

The increasing tendency of incivility amongst the students in Pakistani universities has received little but increasing attention (Shahzadi & Toor, 2025). According to local studies, it is possible to connect uncivil and unsociable ways of behavior to social frustration, academic pressure, and exposure to digital media (Khan et al., 2022). Moreover, the members of the faculty have noted that the constant use of mobile phones and social networks by students during lectures lead to lack of attention and the lack thereof during classroom attendance (Bantha et al., 2020). These trends show that incivility is not only a discipline problem, but a psychosocial consequence of the failure of the students to manage digital communications and study tasks. In such a way, the growing digitalization of the university life can facilitate the growth of social disengagement and stress behaviors indirectly (Jamil, Shahzadi, & Toor, 2025).

Techno-stress is a comparatively new phenomenon, which defines the psychological discomfort of a person due to the failure to manage successfully the demands of information and communication technology (Tarafdar et al., 2010). These are anxiety, fatigue, sleeping disturbances, and a decrease in productivity (Juškaitė, 2017; Hwang and Cha, 2018). These effects are not relevant to university students who can be commonly seen as digital natives (Qi, 2019). Studies have revealed that long-term use of digital platforms and online learning platforms are some of the causes of emotional fatigue, diminished satisfaction, and diminished academic achievement (Abd Aziz and Yazid, 2021; Torales et al., 2022). Another important aspect that could be influencing the academic concentration and the well-being of the students is social media distraction. Being defined as the cognitive interference as a result of the unceasing engagement with the online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Ryan et al., 2017), it has been connected to a reduced attention span, a multitasking pattern, and poor academic performance (Feng et al., 2019; Karpinski et al., 2013). Research has shown that students spending a lot of time on social media during lectures or study time have lower retention, understanding and critical thinking ability (Limniou, 2021).

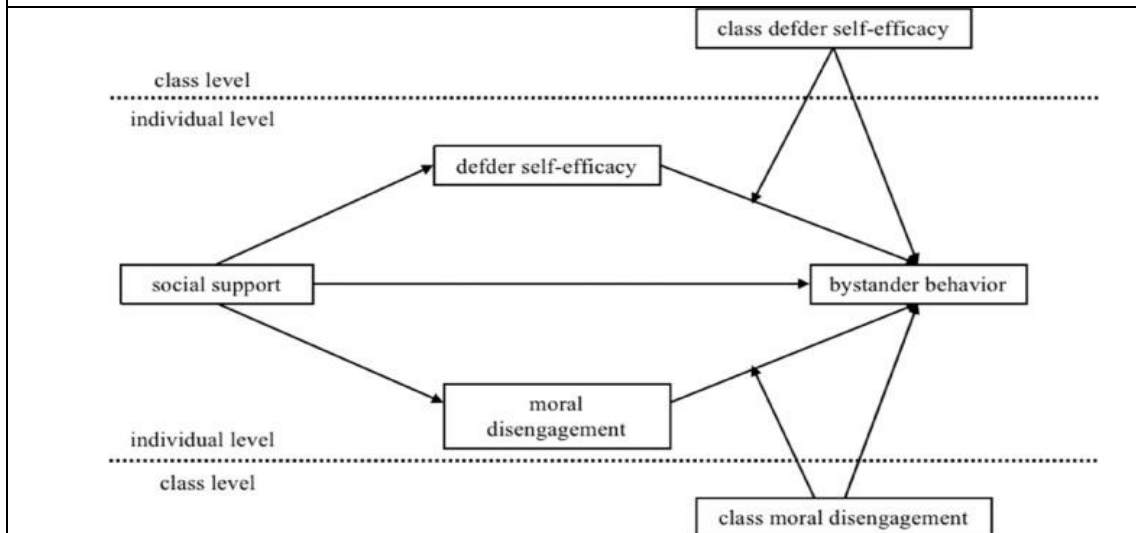
The present research is based on four theoretical perspectives that are complementary Social Strain Theory, Moral Disengagement Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Self-Determination Theory that are used to describe the psychological and social processes through which social media distraction and techno-stress contribute to social incivility among university students.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model Illustrating the Mediating Role of Gratitude between Incivility, Academic Stress, and Psychological Distress



Social media distracter and techno stress are combined with these approaches, and the paper suggests that through the establishment of emotional burden, mental burden, and a deficit in moral control, social incivility is supported. The awareness of these mechanisms can inform educational policymakers and mental professionals to devise ways of improving the digital well-being of students and foster a sense of civility in education settings.

Figure: Conceptual Model Illustrating the Relationship among Social Support, Defender Self-Efficacy, Moral Disengagement, and Bystander Behavior at Class and Individual Levels



Methodology

Research Design

The current study followed a quantitative correlational design study to consider the association between social media distraction, techno-stress, and social incivility

among students studying at the university. The design was suitable to establish predictive relationships among the variables of the study and the degree to which social media distraction and techno-stress provoke the experiences of social incivility among the students. The data were collected using the self-administered structured questionnaire that was administered to Pakistani university students.

Participants

The population that was targeted included the students studying in the different departments of the University of Gujrat. The number of students (343) was adequate and representative, since Taro Yamane (1967) formula was used on a finite population to determine its size. The stratified random sampling method was used to sample through the participants of the various academic disciplines and the year of study. The inclusion criterion needed the participants to be active social media users and be taking an undergraduate course currently. There was representation of both male and female students who are of varied academic and socioeconomic status.

Instruments

The research involved a structured survey, which comprised of four parts, namely: demographic facts and standardized questions to examine the three main variables of the research, namely the social incivility, technological stress, and the distracter of social media.

Social Incivility Scale - This scale was based on Morrisette (2001) and Khan et al. (2022) which was adapted to measure the frequency of discourteousness, disrespectfulness, or disruptiveness in academic contexts and was experienced or witnessed. It was rated on a 5-point Likert scale according to the ratings 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Techno-Stress Scale – Items were based on Tarafdar et al. (2010) and Juškaitė (2017) and they measured five dimensions of techno-stress, which were techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty.

Social Media Distraction Scale - According to Ryan et al. (2017) and Feng et al. (2019), the scale evaluated the degree by which the attentional and academic concentration of students were impaired by using social media, receiving notification, and multitasking online.

Our research study instruments were of high internal consistency with Cronbach alpha coefficients exceeding .80, which are deemed highly reliable. The content validity was determined by constructing it with the expertise of three faculty members who had majored in psychology and sociology.

Procedure

The researcher sent out the printed questionnaires to sampled students in the classroom hours after seeking formal permission with the Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat. The study was a voluntary participation that implied an informed consent of every respondent. The goal of the research was well stated and

the participants were convinced of confidentiality and anonymity of their answers. A total of four weeks were taken to collect the data. Prior to statistical analysis, questionnaires were free of inaccuracy and omission.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in compliance with the ethical guidelines that were accepted by the Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat. The informed consent was obtained and gained by the participants who were provided with confidentiality and withdrawn in case of unwillingness. No personal data were gathered, and the information was not applied to any other use. There was no harm or risk incurred by the subjects in the research. Every practice was done in accordance with APA (2020) ethical standards of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Data Analysis

The analysis was done in the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. The analysis of the responses to every scale and demographic characteristics was summarized using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage). The strengths and direction of relationships among variables were established by using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) of Pearson. A Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was used to measure the predictive ability of social media distraction and techno-stress on social incivility. The level of significance was $p < .05$. Findings revealed large positive correlations of the three variables and the combination of social media distraction and techno-stress explained 42% of the variance in the social incivility scores.

Results

Table: 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables among University Students

Variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Error	SD
Bullying Behavior	6	24	12.12	.231	4.278
Disruptive Behavior	5	20	10.38	.182	3.369
Lack of Empathy	5	20	10.41	.165	3.047
Disregard for Rules	5	20	9.17	.191	3.539
Techno Fatigue	5	20	14.71	.174	3.227
Techno Learning	4	16	11.20	.144	2.663
Feeling Exclusion	4	16	10.26	.153	2.830
Privacy Concern	5	20	14.85	.192	3.550
Device Dependency	5	20	13.60	.186	3.440
Frequency of Scrolling	6	24	16.10	.220	4.076
Productivity Concern	4	16	11.66	.137	2.545

The descriptive statistics indicate average social incivility and techno-stress levels of students. Mean scores paint the picture of relatively high privacy concerns ($M = 14.85$), techno-fatigue ($M = 14.71$), and frequent scroll behavior ($M = 16.10$), which can be viewed as a high level of digital interaction and stress. Redder means of

neglect of regulations (M = 9.17) and bullying (M = 12.12) indicate relatively less blatant incivility.

Table: 2 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for Study Variables

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.897	54

The reliability test demonstrated that the item scale in the 54-item size had a Cronbach alpha of .897; it is very strong. This implies that everything included in the questionnaire was very reliable and captured measures across the study subjects.

Table: 3 Correlation Matrix between Social Media Distraction and Social Incivility Factors

Var.	DEDP	FOS	PRCR	BUBE	DIBE	LEOM	DIFR
DEDP	343						
FOS	.549**	343					
PRCR	.206**	.446**	343				
BUBE	.163**	.178**	.036	343			
DIBE	.245**	.183**	.043	.366**	343		
LEOM	.167**	.210**	.032	.418**	.402**	343	
DIFR	.117*	.138*	-.054	.414**	.596**	.519**	343

The results of the correlation point to the significant positive correlations between most of the study variables. The more frequent scrolling and privacy concerns were also an indicator of excess use of devices, as well as higher device dependency. Three variables, which encompassed bullying, disruptive behavior, and absence of empathy, had close relationships, and these relationships experienced overlapping patterns of social incivility. Also, ignoring rules was the primary predictor of disruptive behavior and low empathy, which speaks of the behavioral and moral apathy among students.

Table 4 Model Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.234 ^a	.055	.049		10.641

The regression model indicates the regression of the associates was $R = .234$ and $R^2 = .055$ which implies that the accounted variance is 5.5 percent in the dependent variable. The adjusted $R^2 = .049$ indicates that there is a small but significant predictive relationship. The standard error 10.64 is a moderate variation around the regression line and this is an indication that other unknown variables can also contribute towards the outcome.

Table 5 Analysis of Variance for Simple Linear Regression Predicting Social Incivility

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2223.274	2	1111.637	9.817	.000
Residual	38500.102	340	113.236		
Total	40723.376	342			

According to the ANOVA findings, the regression model is statistically significant, $F(2, 340) = 9.82$, $p < .001$ meaning that the predictors, social media distraction, and techno-stress significantly explain variation in social incivility. Despite the low overall explained variance, the model is able to predict the changes in uncivil behaviors of students depending on the technological and social media.

Table:6 Regression Coefficients for Social Incivility Predicted by Social Media Distraction and Techno-Stress

Model	Coefficients ^a				Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	32.230	3.562		9.048	.000
Techno Stress	-.111	.077	-.093	-1.453	.147
Social Media Distraction	.376	.088	.274	4.269	.000

According to the regression coefficients, the social media distraction is a significant predictor of social incivility $\beta = .27$, $t = 4.27$ and the regression coefficient of $\beta = .27$ means that the more students are distracted the more uncivil behaviors are likely to occur. However, the techno-stress did not become a significant predictor $\beta = -.09$, $t = -$

1.45, $p = .147$ indicating that its direct effect is not powerful. The column $B = 32.23$ demonstrates the level of social incivility when the predictors take a constant value of 32.23.

Table: 7 Model Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.221 ^a	.049	.046		10.659

The regression model is presented below with a $R = .221$ and a $R^2 = .049$, which implies that the predictors have a 4.9 percent-explaining power of the variance of the dependent variable. The adjusted $R^2 = .046$ justifies the negligible but significant effect of prediction. The value of 10.66 is considered to be moderate implying that although the model is statistically noteworthy, there are other underlying factors that could also explain such differences in social incivility.

Table: 8Regression Coefficients for the Effect of Social Media Distraction on Social Incivility

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	29.554	3.054		9.678	.000
Social Media Distraction	.303	.073	.221	4.179	.000

The regression outcomes suggest that social media distraction is a highly correlating positive predictor of social incivility $\beta = .22$, $t = 4.18$. This implies that the higher the social media distraction is, the higher are the chances that the students may become engrossed in uncivil activities. Constant $B = 29.55$ is the level of social incivility in the absence of distraction indicating a significant role of digital involvement on the social behavior of students.

Discussion

The current paper has examined the predictive value of social media distraction and techno-stress as explanatory factors of social incivility among Pakistani university students. The results presented moderate social incivility and techno-stress scores, and the means were very high regarding privacy concern, techno-fatigue and frequent scrolling behavior, which indicates that students undergo significant digital stress because of overuse of the Internet (Jamil, Shahzadi, & Toor, 2025). Such findings are consistent with the current research indicating that all-time connectivity and digital multitasking cause severe stress and exhaustion in young adults (Bukhari and Baig, 2022; Majeed et al., 2023). These results are alarmingly high in terms of techno-fatigue, which shows that university students are unable to find a healthy balance

between technology-related and academic issues, which correlates with the results of Long and Liu (2022) who reported that a long period of using technologies causes mental burnout and a lack of social sensitivity.

The correlation analysis revealed that having a dependency on the device, scrolling frequency and privacy concerns had a positive relationship with other types of social incivilities such as bullying, disruptive behavior, and defiance to rules. It correlates with past studies that conclude that excessive use of digital devices might contribute to a lack of empathy and antisocial behavior (Archer et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). The good correlation between disruptive behavior, the deficiency of empathy, and the absence of regard to rules in the given study supports the importance of mechanisms of moral disengagement and social strain that are specific to a virtual environment. The same results were obtained by Javed and Khan (2023), who indicate that Pakistani university students who devote more time to social media report increased irritability, interpersonal conflicts, as well as reduced emotional regulation.

Regression analyses also proved that social media distraction was a strong predictor of social incivility but techno stress did not have a direct impact. These findings indicate that behavioral effects of social media distracter that is evident in repeated checking, scrolling, and multitasking have a more immediate effect to the student's behavior than the cognitive burden caused by the techno-stress. This tendency aligns with the recent evidence provided by Al-Marroof et al. (2023) and Yu et al. (2021), who identified that attention and self-regulation under social media are interfered with, leading to frustration and disrespecting attitudes of online and offline communication. This study has a relatively low R^2 (5.5 percent) which implies that although social media distraction is a potential cause of incivility, there are other psychosocial and contextual factors that might contribute including peer influence, emotional intelligence, and campus culture (Mahmood et al., 2024, Jamil, Shahzadi, & Toor, 2025).

This result that techno-stress was not a significant predictor diverges with some studies conducted at the international level (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Ishola et al., 2022) but agrees with studies highlighting the importance of techno-stress effects being indirectly mediated by emotional exhaustion, academic burnout, and lowering of well-being (Liu et al., 2023). Students in the Pakistani situation might have acquired adaptive coping strategies in solving technological problems because of greater exposure to the blended and online learning conditions after the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmad et al., 2022). Such coping techniques however seem to be overridden by notorious social media distraction which divides focus and encourages the impulsive reaction.

The findings seem to emphasize the need to manage social incivility as one of the psychosocial impacts of digital overuse. Universities ought to explicitly think about having digital literacy and mindfulness courses in order to teach students to check their online actions, deal with stress, and become more empathetic. Digital responsibility training interventions are found to enhance self-control and aggression among young adults (Dhir et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022). Moreover, adding to university curricula psychoeducational lessons on digital civility might make students more supportive and respectful towards the norms of the institution in their interaction with peers.

Comprehensively, the research will add to the existing body of literature on the behavioral consequences of digital interaction with university students in South Asia. It makes one emphasize that social media distraction is dangerous to social harmony and academic culture more than techno-stress is. Further studies are encouraged to use longitudinal and mixed-method research designs that study mediating variables like emotional regulation, perceived academic pressure, and digital self-efficacy to gain a better perspective of the impact of technological behaviors on social behavior.

Conclusion

The current research summarizes that social media distraction is a significant predictor of social incivility amongst college students, but techno-stress has an indirect or a minor influence. The results indicate that too much online time shown by excessive scrolling, privacy, and dependency on the devices have adverse impacts on empathy, discipline, and interpersonal behavior of students. The research highlights the lack of urgency of digital balance and civility training in institutions of higher learning in Pakistan. The awareness programs on the emotional control, proper use of technologies, and online etiquette ought to be incorporated in universities. There can also be a crucial role of counselling centres that will assist students to cope with the stress of the Internet and other interpersonal conflicts. Further studies are also needed to focus on mediating variables like emotional intelligence, academic pressure and moral disengagement to get a better insight into how digital behaviours influence social behaviours. Digital mindfulness and empathy-oriented interventions should be encouraged to help improve healthier internet relationships and lead to more respectful universities.

Limitations and Suggestions

In spite of its useful results, there are some limitations of this study. The shape of the research was cross-sectional, and the self-reported data was used as the main measure, which is prone to a social desirability bias. This study was also restricted to a single institution of higher learning, so the findings can never be applicable to the rest of the student body in Pakistan. Also, quantitative data have been analysed only, without in-depth information about lived experiences of social incivility in students. Future research must use mixed-method or longitudinal research designs in order to utilize causal relationships and investigate mediating factors like emotional intelligence, moral disengagement and academic stress. The sample size can be expanded in order to cover different universities and private establishments which will help to improve the external validity. Digital literacy training, compassion building workshops, and mindfulness-based programs are also suggested as an intervention to reduce the negative impact of social media distraction on students and their behavior.

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