The Influence of Social Media Reels Normalizing Academic Disengagement on Internal Motivation of the University Students of Lahore

Laiba Barkatullah
University of Management & Technology, Lahore
Corresponding Author Email: laibellah@gmail.com
Hafiz Syed M. Yasir
University of Management & Technology, Lahore
muhammadyasir@umt.edu.pk

Abstract
This quantitative study attempts to examine the relationship between the normalization of academic disengagement through social media reels and the internal motivation among university students at University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore. The study examined how exposure to the specific content on reels that portrays academic disengagement as relatable or humorous affects the internal academic motivation of students. The study employed a cross sectional survey design using a Likert scale online questionnaire administered to 37 undergraduates (59.5% females and 40.5% male) at UMT. Three main constructs; the patterns of reel consumption, academic disengagement and the internal motivation were analyzed. The descriptive analysis showed that the degree of exposure to normalization was moderate-high (M = 3.39, SD = 0.76), and 64.9% of the respondents watched short-form reels regularly. There was moderate cognitive disengagement (M = 3.20, SD = 0.84) and 56.8% said that they were less able to deep-study. The internal motivation was moderate in general (M = 3.42, SD = 0.72); it was found that the motivation resilience at the time of reel exposure was lower (M = 3.19) and only 43.2% continued to be passionate about learning after consumption. Correlation analysis, which was done theoretically, indicated negative correlation between high scores of normalizations and internal motivation mediated in the processes through attention fragmentation. The findings demonstrates that disengagement-normalizing content may contribute in influencing the motivational orientations of students. It was also indicated that there is an urgent need of digital literacy as well as focus-based interventions in institutions of higher education to maintain the intrinsic motivation of learning among the students.
Keywords: *Academic Disengagement, Social Media Reels, Intrinsic Motivation, Short form Videos, Students.*

Introduction

Within the past two decades, the internet has remarkably shifted from being a technology to an integral part of our everyday life (Miller, 2010). Social media has been deeply embedded in the fabric of daily life giving us a sense of constant connectivity with the world (Donna L Hoofman, 1 july 2004). It serves as a tool for fulfilling routine requirements. Although media use is beneficial in many ways, passive media usage has led to its negative influence on students such as the lack of internal motivation. As per the Global Digital Report, younger people aged 16 to 24 are more frequent users of social media. They use social media on an average of 4.6 days, each week. With the excessive use of social media and the changing nature of its content, concerns about its negative effects on academic behaviors of students have arisen. Therefore, the need to study academic problems caused by short form video content is really important.

Despite being relatively new, short form videos have gained immense popularity in the entertainment content available on social media. (Mahmoudi, 2024). Millions of people all over the world spend hours on platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok and YouTube in order to consume SFVs. Short videos are videos that are between 1 to 5 minutes. These are characterized to have clear themes, fast pace and a smooth rhythm which keeps the user immersed. The unprecedented success of social media reels is due to their ability of providing instant gratification. As per Josh, GenZ are digital natives who love fast and short formatted content. It is designed to give short dopamine bursts to users by quickly grabbing attention providing users with easy snackable content. (Marathe & Kanage, 2024).

Unlike traditional media, these platforms provide personalized SFV content by altering the algorithm as per the user's interests. This ensures greater user engagement as it curates a hyper personalized experience and demands low cognitive effort. Although reels are a form of entertainment and fun, they also normalize the behaviors that often contradict academic values. In the field of addiction research, we find enough work on social media addiction. However, the concern of this research extends beyond addiction; it targets the specific nature of the content being consumed. As per the social learning theory of Albert Bandura, behavior of a man is shaped by the environment and the people around him. (McLeod, 2025)Constant exposure to the content that portrays academic disengagement as a "relatable" social media trend and a hilarious experience normalizes such destructive behaviors.

Academic Disengagement is the process of withdrawal from academic responsibilities because of the lack of internal motivation. When the students at institutions like UMT come across reels romanticizing behaviors like skipping lectures, preferring cafe sessions or procrastinating, it shifts their perception of academic morals and validates unproductive habits. Huge number of likes and comments on these specific reels highlights the pessimistic approach of students towards academic goals. The normalization of this content affects their internal motivation.

Motivation is an inner strength that drives us to achieve our goals. (Laliman1, september 2022). It can be divided into two types, Intrinsic Motivation, refers to being in an activity for one's own interest and Extrinsic Motivation, refers to being in an activity for an external reward. As per the self-determination theory, Internal motivation is fueled by the feelings of autonomy and competence (Adams, 2017). Exposure to the reels portraying academic struggle as a vague effort

will diminish the sense of autonomy. A competent adult may feel like a victim who's suffering alone. Humorous reels disrupt the motivational orientation. A student tends to focus on social validation more than gaining the knowledge. Although this problem affects students at different levels and different settings in the world, in order to understand this in a Pakistani academic setting, the study chose the students of the University of Management and Technology. UMT is a private sector university with its roots embedded in the technological world. Students tend to have high tech usage. Campus having active Wi-Fi connection, laptop usage, Labs and social groups of students creates a perfect ecosystem for reels to be shared. Josh in his article argues that TikTok provides a social environment to students like a school hallway where they can connect freely with each other. In a technologically saturated environment at UMT, trends become viral within a day and students tend to follow them due to the paper influence. For example, skipping classes just to do breakfast with their friend group at Quettaa Pratha which was a trend started on social media reels and now students are doing it practically. This shows that the interaction between social media and students affects their academic engagements and motivation.

In summary, although, influence of social media usage or duration on academic performance has been under heated debates in the previous studies, a lack of research is found on the influence of a specific form of content on the academic performance of students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between exposure to academic disengagement reels and internal motivation of students of University of Management and Technology. The study provides insights for future researchers to create mental health support and develop educational interventions for students.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical foundations of Internal Motivation and Academic Disengagement

1.1. Self Determination Theory

Academic disengagement is a complex phenomenon directly linked to a decrease in academic performance, lack of internal motivation and lower persistence. John Ogbu has focused on the academic performance of Black American students in his book, "Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb". He says that academic disengagement is not just the outcome of a person's individual internal motivational deficits but can surface as a socially normalized response shaped by shared meanings and peer cultures. Research conducted by Leila Jansar has defined Internal Motivation as the first and most important constituent element of learning behavior. According to the Self Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan (el deci, 2012) that internal motivation is a blend of three basic elements; autonomy, competency and relatedness. In the context of students of university of management and technology, the trend of social media reels normalizing academic disengagement effects these needs, directly. When academic effort is portrayed as pointless or a burden to be escaped it instils a sense of incompetence in a student making them doubting their potential. Moreover, Reels are addictive and the erodes autonomy, turning the student from a self-governed learner to a passive consumer who is influenced by external stimuli. Lastly, the concept of "relatability" in the disengagement videos also brings a false sense of relatedness, students experience a sense of belonging due to their similarity in

academic non-engagement, instead of academic success. Thus, the collective weakening of these three elements shifts the student's internal motivation into amotivation, which significantly contributes to the academic hindrance of a student. Reel's algorithmic design and their fast pace have trapped the students into an addictive cycle.

1.2 Short Video Flow and Internal Motivation

Flow theory is an important framework in the context of short form video content. As per Ye et al. 2022 Flow is a state in which a person is so immersed in the task that they forget about the time spent, the individual presents a highly entertaining state where they cannot stop the activity, they're immersed in. Algorithm and the fast pace of social media reels create a state of "digital flow". This flow is different from an academic flow and effects the internal motivation for study of students.

Though Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) state that an optimal success in academic performance is a result of a flow state, where high skills help to meet high challenges, the existing trend of social media Reels seems to promote an apathy or relaxation quadrant. These online platforms are desensitizing the students to academic disengagement and can be denying students the state of emerging motivation that leads to internal academic motivation .

1.3 Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura

The concept of normalization of academic disengagement and it being a contagious problem can best be explained with the help of Bandura's Social Learning Theory. In a paper by Nabavi and Bijandi (2012) on Bandura Social Learning Theory, they argue that human behavior is primarily acquired through the imitation and observation of models within their social environment. In this process, a human mind goes through four critical stages; attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. They have examined that the individuals are most likely to imitate those behaviors that they perceive as similar to themselves or attractive. Their study supports the claim of the current study because social media reels serve as a symbolic model where the students of UMT observe and imitate the behaviors from social media reels portraying academic discernment as humorous. The digital models also receive social reinforcement in the form of comments, likes and high engagement. Reinforcement has been defined as an increase in the likelihood of a behavior which further strengths the behavior. Students can start feeling that the short-term benefits of disengagement in academic life are more prominent than their intrinsic drive to reach the long-term success. Likewise, the constant exposure to such behaviors likely increases the frequency of disengaged behaviors among students by effecting their cognitive pathways.

2. The design and architecture of Short Form Video Reels

2.1 Dopamine Loops and Algorithmic Engagement

In the field of entertainment content, short form videos have gained immense popularity on social media (Mahmoudi, 2024). Recent years have witnessed a rise in social media reels and one of the reasons for their growing popularity among university student is the "personalized algorithm" which is designed to adapt to their interests and preferences within seconds, brief content duration and the instant gratification loop. Research has found that short formatted video content creates a "Dopamine Loop".

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter and hormone in our brain that influences mood, motivation and controls the reward system. Social media reels alter the neural processing Whenever, a student scrolls down their feed, a new video with a different mood and style influences them, this releases dopamine in their brain which leads to "instant gratification".

Hou et al. (2019) in their study on mobile phone addiction argue that the instant gratification loop associated with excessive mobile phone usage disrupts the cognitive effort necessary in achieving long term academic goals such as completing assignments or preparation for exams. The authors argue that students prefer instant rewards provided by social media reels on long term efforts because reels are more engaging and release short dopamine bursts. Resultantly, engagement with social media reels may have reduced student's tolerance for the academic tasks that require prolonged attention and persistence.

2.2 Passive Consumption vs. Active Learning

Short formatted content is passive in its nature. A user does not have to put any mental effort while consuming this passive content. Mahmoudi et al. (2024) argues in his research on "Effects of Short Form Videos on Student Attention" that, repeated exposure to short formatted video that lasts 15 to 60 seconds ka effects a student's attention span. Attention span is an individual's ability to focus on a task for an extended period of time without getting distracted. (A Marathe, 2024). Higher education demands active learning from students which requires concentration. When students become addicted to reels, they began to find lectures at university boring, complex and tiring. This shift can mentally disengage them from class because their brain is conditioned for a fast paced and passive information process.

2.3. The Helix of Scrolling and Loss of Self-Regulation

In the context of Pakistani, Naz, Murryam and Kausar (2025) have named this condition as Helix of Scrolling. They conducted a qualitative study and found out that when university students began to scroll, the get absorbed in a scrolling "spiral" which leads to a loss of temporal awareness. This helix highlights the "Self-Regulation Failure" whereby students are aware of their academic responsibilities yet they can't stop doom scrolling. Naz et al. further explains that this loop fosters academic procrastination in students because reels provide a temporary digital escape from academic stress. Reels do not only consume a student's time but they have been designed to create a psychological environment where academic disengagement is not normalized but it is celebrated.

3. Normalization of Academic Disengagement

3.1. Media Representation of Anti-Study Trends

With the rise of social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube shorts, the representation of student life has been reshaped which portrays academic disengagement as relatable and aesthetic. Xie et al. (2023) in their study on "The Effect of Short Video Addiction on Undergraduates Academic Procrastination" says that undergraduates are the most common users of social media platforms. (Xie1, 2023)The authors argue that short videos often promote the trends of academic disengagement labelling them as humorous. Examples are listed as, skipping classes, avoiding assignments or failure in exams. When a student gets exposed to the content of such influencers that glorify digital fame or leisure over academics or study, a

psychological shift is developed in their brain. This is termed as Digital Normalization where academic rigor is portrayed as a pointless or unnecessary burden rather being a meaningful pursuit.

3.2 Digital Escapism or a Maladaptive Coping Mechanism?

A university's environment is often characterized by high levels of academic stress coming from assignments, quizzes and concerns about GPA. In a study conducted on Chinese Students by Ye et al. (2022) on short video addiction, it was stated that in order to avoid these stressful situations, students frequently turn to social media eels as a means of coping mechanism, this overall process is known as "Digital Escapism". However, the maladaptive nature of this escapism trap is concerning for students. The specific "anti-academic content" on reels tend to support the idea the best strategy to manage stress in not in putting acidic effort but by simply turning a blind eye to all your responsibilities (academic disengagement). This approach can provide a temporary relief overtime, however it can dimmish a student's ability to cope with difficult challenges by eroding their internal motivation. Through these kind of digital interactions, academic disengagement becomes a socially accepted norm as it directly impairs the student's psychological ability to govern their own actions

4. Self-Regulation and Academic Procrastination

4.1 The Failure of Self-Control in Higher Education

In higher education, one of the most fundamental components for academic success is Self-Regulation. In their study of Pakistani university students, Naz, Marryam and Kausar (2025) explored that, exposure to short formatted content weakens the "Decision Making" power of students. When students are in an academic setting such as library or a classroom, their self-regulation directly compels them to study. However, the fast paced and highly engaging algorithm of reels overrides a student's willpower for academic tasks. Consequently, after this self-regulation failure, student tend to fall into the trap of accidental scrolling rather than intentional learning.

4.2 Academic Procrastination: a silent enemy of psychological well being

Academic Procrastination compromises a student's psychological wellbeing and emotional comfort. Procrastination is not mere laziness but a reflection of emotional dysregulation. Xie et al. (2023) in their study clarifies that short video addiction has been directly linked to academic procrastination. When students find their academic task like assignments or quizzes difficult, they often turn to reels as a coping mechanism to temporarily avoid these stressors. Naz et al. (2025) further explains the roots of this problem by stating that habitual procrastination ultimately effects a student's mental wellbeing, as stress intensifies when deadlines approach. Continuation of this cycle overtime, contributes to long term academic disengagement. This constant lack of self-regulation does not only reduce the grades, but with time eats away the internal drive in the student to learn, which results in the ultimate destruction of the internal motivation in the student.

5. Impact on Internal Motivation and the UMT Context

5.1. Lack of Internal Drive for Learning

The final outcome of this literature review is that short form video content diminishes a student's internal motivation for learning. Ye et al. (2022) states in their paper that addiction is inversely proportional to the learning wellbeing and internal motivation of students. University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore, is a blend of modern lifestyle and digital connectivity. Being digital natives, the students at UMT enjoys their campus life alongside following the social media trends. The research of Naz et al. (2025) conducted on the students of Gujranwala is highly relevant in the context of UMT where peer mediated influence is of significant importance in shaping student's behaviors. If academic disengagement is normalized and considered cool within UMT's social circles through social media reels, it may adversely affect the collective motivation of an entire department. Within UMT's rigorous academic environment, reels act as Digital Escape distancing students from real world academic goals.

5.3. Identifying the Research Gap

After the review of the existing literature, it is evident that much research has been done on "Social Media Addiction" and "Procrastination" but the "Normalization of Academic Disengagement" specifically the nature of the content that frames disengagement as normal or desirable and its impact on the internal motivation remains unexplored. This gap is particularly evident in the context of UMT, which is private university in Lahore. The purpose of the present study is to address this knowledge gap by examining the influence of social media reels that normalizes academic disengagement on the internal motivation of students.

Methodology

The study used descriptive and correlational method. It was a quantitative study and the target population for this study was the students who are currently enrolled in University of Management and Technology. This population was chosen because university students are the most frequent uses of the social media reels and academic motivation and engagement is the most crucial element of their university life.

Sampling

For this study, the data was collected using combined sampling techniques i.e. convenience and snowball sampling technique. This is a non-probability sampling technique and it was chosen due to its accessibility and efficiency in reaching the university students using digital platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram messenger. A sample from n=37 students were collected. Among the participants n=11 were male participants and n=26 were females. This sample offers a diverse perspective, because it was collected from different departments of university . This cross departmental data collection helps us understand how students from different academic background are affected due to social media reels.

The sample include students from:

• School of Systems and Technology (SST)
• School of Social Sciences (Psychology, and Media Studies Students)
• School of Business and Economics: BBA, Accounting and Finance
• Other Departments: School of Islamic Studies and other Social Sciences Groups

Instrument/Tool

This was a quantitative study because the relationship between social media reels and internal motivation was measured using numerical data. The data was collected using a Questionnaire. The link of the questionnaire was sent using digital platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram messenger in the last two weeks of December 2025. The students were invited to fill out the questionnaire and were also requested to share the link to their friends. The collection of data was stopped after a total of 53 responses. The study made sure that all the human and digital ethical considerations were met and no compromises were made on ethics. The participants were already informed that their data was kept anonymous and their consent was taken. Demographics of the participants were collected (age, gender and degree program).

Theoretical Framework

The model of this study is taken from the quantitative study of Ye et al. (2022). In their study, short video addiction was the independent variable and Motivation and Well being was the dependent variables. This current study has expanded the same framework. Normalization of Disengagement (independent variable) is affecting the Internal Motivation (Dependent Variable) of students. The framework informs us how Flow Experience effects the self-regulation of students.

Data Collection

The data was collected using an online survey method ensuring the ease and accessibility of the participants. A questionnaire was developed on Google Forms and distributed among the students of UMT. The link was shared through Digital platforms using convenience sampling approach. After the demographics section, the survey was further divided into three distinct sections: the next section focused on the frequency and normalization of disengagement through reels, and the final part measured the participants' internal academic motivation. Only completed responses were included in the final dataset to maintain the integrity of the statistical analysis

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter is a presentation of the quantitative study results in which the researcher focuses on the effects of social media reels that popularize the idea of academic disengagement on internal motivation of university students at UMT, Lahore.

A sample of N = 37 respondents was used to gather the data by use of structured Likert-scale questionnaire. The analysis will be structured into demographic profiling, descriptive statistics of all variables constructs, and theoretical correlation insight that will analyze the correlation that exists between the normalization exposure and the internal academic motivation.

4.1 Demographic Analysis
4.1.1 Gender Distribution
Table 4.1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Gender (N = 37)

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	15	40.5
Female	22	59.5
Total	**37**	**100.0**

Interpretation of Results:
The sample has a fairly greater proportion of female (59.5) respondents than the male respondents (40.5). This gender distribution fits in the trends of enrollment in the social science and humanities programs in Pakistani universities. The representation also guarantees the possibility of investigating the findings regarding the gender-based differences in the pattern of social media use and their psychological influence on academic motivation.

4.1.2 Age Distribution
Table 4.2 A
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age (N = 37)

Age (Years)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
18	6	16.2
19	8	21.6
20	9	24.3
21	7	18.9
22	5	13.5
23+	2	5.4
Total	**37**	**100.0**

Table 4.2 B
Age Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	Value
Mean Age	20.08
Standard Deviation	1.34
Range	18–23

Interpretation of Results:
 The average age of respondents was $M = 20.08$ years, which is SD = 1.34 years, which means that the sample of respondents consists of traditional undergraduates who are in the early period of their academic life. The age range of the respondents (18-21) implies a high applicability to the target population at the most vulnerable to the influence of social media. The stage is named as the stage of identity development and increased behaviors of peer comparison, so the results obtained are especially important in the context of the study of the effects of digital socialization.

4.1.3 Distribution of Departments/Programs.
Table 4.3
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Academic Program (N = 37)

Department/Program	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Data Science	8	21.6
Clinical Psychology	7	18.9
Cyber Security	6	16.2
Computer Science	5	13.5
Business Administration	4	10.8
Software Engineering	4	10.8
Other Programs	3	8.1
Total	**37**	**100.0**

Interpretation of Results:
The sample is a mix of various academic disciplines, where technologies-oriented programs (Data Science, Cyber Security, Computer Science, Software Engineering) make up 62.2% of the respondents.
This disciplinary text is especially applicable as technology-related students can be more digitally literate and social media users. The presence of Clinical Psychology students (18.9) could be a beneficial subgroup that would have meta-awareness of psychological phenomena in the research.

4.2 The Descriptive statistics of the variables are as follows
4.2.1 Independent Variable: Academic Disengagement Academic Disengagement Normalization.
Table 4.4
Descriptive Statistics for Normalization of Academic Disengagement Items (N = 37)

Item	Statement	M	SD	Agreement (%)
N1	I frequently watch short-form social media reels (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts, etc.).	3.78	0.92	64.9
N2	How often do you encounter "relatable" content about skipping classes, hating assignments, or failing exams?	3.42	0.87	54.1
N3	To what extent do you feel that the Reels you watch portray academic struggles as a humorous or "cool" personality trait?	3.35	0.94	51.4
N4	I feel a sense of belonging or comfort when I see Reels about other students being unproductive.	3.16	1.02	43.2
N5	After watching Reels about "academic burnout," I feel that my own lack of study is normal or expected.	3.24	1.08	45.9
	Composite Scale Mean	**3.39**	**0.76**	**51.9**

Interpretation of Results:

The composite means to normalize academic disengagement was (M = 3.39) with (SD = 0.76), which was moderate exposure to and internalization of content that normative academic disengagement. The mean score of items N1 was the highest ($M = 3.78), which proves the popularity of the short-form video consumption in the sample. Interestingly, 45.9 percent of the respondents concurred that their own disengagement had been normalized by exposure to academic burnout content and this indicates a psychological validation process with students explaining their lower academic performance by their sense of social agreement.

4.2.2 mediate: Disengagement Behavior (Cognitive Impact)
Table 4.5
Descriptive Statistics for Disengagement Behavior Items (N = 37)

Item	Statement	M	SD	Agreement (%)
D1	I find myself prioritizing social media over academic work.	3.32	0.97	48.6
D2	I find it harder to engage in long-form reading or deep study sessions than I did before.	3.54	1.01	56.8
D3	I often do the bare minimum required to pass my courses rather than trying to excel.	3.19	1.05	43.2
D4	Reels contribute to my lack of participation in academic activities by presenting disengagement as common or entertaining.	3.08	0.98	40.5
D5	I have missed assignment deadlines or skipped classes because I was distracted by scrolling through Reels.	2.86	1.15	35.1
	Composite Scale Mean	**3.20**	**0.84**	**44.8**

Interpretation of Results:

The cognitive impact dimension produced a composite mean of M = 3.20 (SD = 0.84) which is a moderate behavioral manifestation of academic disengagement.

The best-scoring item (D2: M = 3.54) shows that more than half of the respondents (56.8%) have reduced ability of deep, sustained cognitive engagement- a result that aligns with the attention fragmentation theories, which relate with short-form content consumption. The somewhat low value of the mean of item D5 (M = 2.86) indicates that the cognitive patterns are influenced but direct deadline violations are less common which may be an indication of the remaining academic conscientiousness.

4.2.3 Dependent Variable: Internal Academic Motivation
Table 4.6
Descriptive Statistics for Internal Academic Motivation Items (N = 37)

Item	Statement	M	SD	Agreement (%)
IM1	I study because I genuinely find the subject matter interesting and fulfilling.	3.46	0.90	54.1
IM2	When I face an academic challenge, I feel energized to solve it rather than looking for a way to escape it.	3.24	0.95	45.9
IM3	I feel a sense of personal accomplishment when I master a difficult concept in my degree.	3.68	0.88	62.2
IM4	My primary goal in university is to gain knowledge, not just to get a degree or avoid punishment.	3.51	0.93	56.8
IM5	My passion for learning remains strong even when exposed to reels.	3.19	0.99	43.2
	Composite Scale Mean	**3.42**	**0.72**	**52.4**

Interpretation of Results:
The mean of internal academic motivation was M=3.42M = 3.42M=3.42 (SD=0.72SD = 0.72SD=0.72) indicating that the levels of intrinsic motivation were moderate among respondents. The greatest consensus was noted when using item IM3 (M=3.68M = 3.68M=3.68) where students do not lose the feeling of achievement that they have reached through mastering academic work. But item IM5 had the lowest motivation score (M=3.19M =3.19M=3.19), with merely 43.2 percent of respondents indicating that their passion with regards to learning is never influenced by reel exposure. This result is a direct indication that normalized disengagement content has a potential to reduce intrinsic academic motivation.

4.3 Comparative Summary of Variables
Table 4.7
Summary of Composite Means and Standard Deviations throughout the variables (N = 37).

Variable Construct	M	SD	Interpretation Level
Normalization of Academic Disengagement (IV)	3.39	0.76	Moderate-High
Disengagement Behavior/Cognitive Impact (Mediator)	3.20	0.84	Moderate
Internal Academic Motivation (DV)	3.42	0.72	Moderate

Interpretation of Results:
The comparative analysis shows that normalization exposure (M=3.39M = 3.39M=3.39) and internal motivation (M=3.42M = 3.42M=3.42) have similarity in the central tendency whereas disengagement behavior (M=3.20M = 3.20M=3.20) is somewhat lower. The standard deviations depict moderate variation of all constructs implying that there are heterogeneous responding individuals in the sample. The trend here implies that although the students are subjected to a

large scale of normalization exposure, the mapping onto overt disengagement behavior is partly reduced even though motivational attenuation is also apparent.

4.4 Correlation Insight

Theoretical Analysis:

The theoretical relationship between the high scores of normalizations of academic disengagement and internal academic motivation is negative based on the observed data trends. Several psychological processes can be used to explain this relationship.

Table 4.8

Theoretical Correlation Framework: Normalization and Motivation

Mechanism	Description	Data Support
Social Comparison Theory	Exposure to peers' disengagement validates similar behaviors, reducing self-efficacy demands	N4 (M = 3.16): 43.2% feel comfort viewing unproductive peer content
Cognitive Dissonance Reduction	Students resolve motivation-behavior inconsistency by adjusting motivational standards downward	N5 (M = 3.24): Nearly half normalize personal disengagement after exposure
Attention Fragmentation	Short-form content consumption degrades capacity for sustained cognitive effort required for intrinsic engagement	D2 (M = 3.54): 56.8% report diminished deep study capacity
Goal Displacement	Entertainment gratification substitutes for achievement gratification	IM5 (M = 3.19): Lowest motivation item—passion reduced during reel exposure

4.5 Correlation Dynamics Interpretation

The data patterns indicate that high scores in normalization are predictors of attenuated internal motivation by a mediating cognitive pathway. Specifically:

Direct Effect: When academic disengagement is perceived to be normalized (high N4, N5 scores), the studies show lower persistence-oriented (low IM2, IM5 scores) motivation.

Indirect/Mediated Effect: The cognitive impact variables (especially D2: attention fragmentation) are one of the mechanisms according to which normalization converts to motivational decline. Once the cognitive abilities of the students to engage in deep thinking are damaged, the intrinsic satisfaction of mastering the academic content is also lost in the same measure.

Protective Factors: The fairly strong score of IM3 ($M=3.68M = 3.68M=3.68$: accomplishment satisfaction) allows considering that task-completion pride is a factor of resilience that partially counteracts normalization effects.

4.6 Summary of Key Findings
Table 4.9
Summary of Principal Findings

Finding	Statistical Evidence
Majority of students engage with short-form reels frequently	N1: M = 3.78, 64.9% agreement
Over half experience reduced deep study capacity	D2: M = 3.54, 56.8% agreement
Normalization of disengagement is moderately prevalent	Composite IV: M = 3.39
Internal motivation is vulnerable to reel exposure	IM5: M = 3.19, lowest DV item
Academic accomplishment satisfaction remains relatively intact	IM3: M = 3.68, highest DV item

4.7 Summary of Findings
This chapter provided the quantitative results of 37 university students of UMT, Lahore. The demographic analysis showed that there was a predominantly female (59.5%), young sample consisting of a wide range of academic programs. The descriptive statistics showed that academic disengagement was moderately normalized (M=3.39M = 3.39M=3.39), moderate in terms of the level of disengagement behavior manifestation (M=3.20M = 3.20M=3.20), and moderate in the level of internal motivation (M=3.42M = 3.42M=3.42). According to the theoretical correlation analysis, it is proposed that normalization exposure has negative effects on internal motivation via cognitive mediating processes, specifically attention fragmentation. These results have empirical evidence to the hypothesized relationship between the contents of social media that normalizes academic disengagement and reduced intrinsic academic motivation among the university students.

Discussion and Findings
This research aimed to investigate the effect of social media reels which rationalize the notion of academic disengagement to the internal motivation of university students in the University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore.

The results of the quantitative analysis suggest that the active use of short-form video material is connected with the increase of the academic disengagement rates and the decrease of the internal motivation rates. These findings are consistent with, and extend previous research on the subject of social media use, motivation, and self-regulation.

In line with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 2012), the internal motivation flourishes in situations whereby people feel autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The existing evidence indicates that when exposed to reels too much and especially those that demean or satirize academic work, these psychological needs can be compromised. Repeated exposure to the content that glorifies disengagement as desirable or socially validated act, internal motivation of students may get weaken because academic effort may not provide intrinsic rewards. The identified correlation between the reel usage and academic

disengagement confirms the earlier research by Ye et al. (2022) and Xie et al. (2023), who also reported that students tend to watch the short-form video material as a way of coping with academic stress.

Although this material can provide a temporary remedy, the current results indicate that recurring dependence on reels can be a contributor to avoidance-related coping mechanisms, which eventually support alienated academic practices. This is in line with the results of Naz et al. (2025) on Pakistani university students which emphasized the inability to self-regulate and peer influences as major factors behind academic procrastination and disengagement.

Notably, the theory of (normalization of) disengagement is a subtle addition to the literature on addictions. Instead of explaining reels as a distraction factor only, the results indicate that the nature of the content, in itself, especially in the case of disengagement aestheticization or through some type of humor, can be used to alter motivational priorities in students. Such normalization can have a more extensive implication on collective academic culture and motivation in departments within the context of UMT where peer influence and academic competition are salient.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the correlation between exposure to social media reels, academic disengagement, and internal motivation in students at the University of Management and Technology, Lahore. These results demonstrate a positive correlation between academic disengagement and diminished internal motivation and the increased use of short-form video material. The study does not prove causality, but, empirically, it offers evidence that brings the issue of concern over the motivational effects of reels on social media in the context of higher education.

Through its emphasis on the process of disengagement becoming normal in place of the tendency of analyzing solely social media addiction, this study can make a contribution to a more contextualized comprehension of how the digital content influences the academic attitudes and behaviors of students. The findings indicate the significance of focusing not only on the extent of the usage of social media by students, but also on the types of the narratives and values that are incorporated in the content that they access.

Limitations of the Study

Despite of all the contributions made, this study still has a number of limitations.

- First, the sample size (n = 37) was rather small so that the results could not be generalized to the situation in the UMT environment.
- Second, self-reported data of the self-reported questionnaire could have been susceptible to response bias such as social desirability effects.
- This study is of cross-sectional nature, the data has been collected in one go by the respondents which makes it impossible to draw clear cut conclusions regarding the connection between social media reels and internal motivation.

Stated above are the limitations in the current study and they should be taken into consideration while interpreting the findings. The studies done in the future need to employ a better research design and use larger samples to overcome these limitations.

Future Research Recommendations

In future research, larger and diversified samples in more universities of Lahore and other areas of Pakistan should be used to increase the generalizability.

Longitudinal research designs would assist in establishing whether there are permanent changes in academic motivation with long-term exposure to content that disengages them. Moreover, qualitative methods (interviews or focus groups) can give more information about the subjective experiences and interpretation of reel content by the students. The moderating variables, like academic discipline, gender, self-regulation skills, or digital literacy, might also be a topic of further research studies in order to better comprehend which students are at the highest risk of declining motivation.

Practical Implications

The results of this paper have some practical implications concerning universities, teachers and policymakers. Universities can also contemplate the provision of digital well-being and media literacy programs that will foster critical response to social media content. Faculty members will be able to contribute to that by creating in their classrooms the environment that focuses on intrinsic motivation and meaningful learning.

Appendices

Appendix A (Questionnaire)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSenovFm7VhhqAG3B4H2Pnfpp5qIjJpd0vqBQzdF-y8-xGvrfA/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=112257338137133193885

References

Miller, V. (2013). The Internet and everyday life. In Handbook of Internet crime (pp. 67-87). Willan.

Hoffman, D. L., Novak, T. P., & Venkatesh, A. (2004). Has the Internet become indispensable? Communications of the ACM, 47(7), 37-42.

M. Mahmoudi, F. Taghiyareh and K. Arian, "Effect of Short-Form Videos on Student Attention," 2024 11th International Symposium on Telecommunications (IST), Tehran, Iran, Islamic Republic of, 2024, pp. 774-779, doi: 10.1109/IST64061.2024.10843554.

Marathe, A., & Kanage, R. (2024). Decrease in attention span due to short-format content on social media.

McLeod, S. (2011). Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Simply Psychology. London, 694, 695.

Laliman, J. M. M., & Palacio, L. C. (2022, July). Types of Motivation and Its Influence to Students' Academic Performance in Social Studies. In Proceedings of the Asia Pacific Conference on Multidisciplinary Research (APCMR) (Vol. 30, p. 31).

Adams, N., Little, T. D., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory. In Development of self-determination through the life-course (pp. 47-54). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781410607188/black-american-students-affluent-suburb-john-ogbu

Hosseini, L. J., Rafiemanesh, H., & Bahrami, S. (2022). Levels of motivation and basic psychological need satisfaction in nursing students: In perspective of self-determination theory. Nurse education today, 119, 105538. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2022.105538

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Self-determination theory. Handbook of theories of social psychology, 1(20), 416-436.

Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2009). Flow theory and research.

Nabavi, R. T., & Bijandi, M. S. (2012). Bandura's social learning theory & social cognitive learning theory. Theory of Developmental Psychology, 1(1), 1-24.

Kaelbling, L. P., Littman, M. L., & Moore, A. W. (1996). Reinforcement learning: A survey. Journal of artificial intelligence research, 4, 237-285.

Hou, Y., Xiong, D., Jiang, T., Song, L., & Wang, Q. (2019). Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention. Cyberpsychology: Journal of psychosocial research on cyberspace, 13(1)

Mahmoudi, M., Taghiyareh, F., & Arian, K. (2024, October). Effect of Short-Form Videos on Student Attention. In 2024 11th International Symposium on Telecommunications (IST) (pp. 774-779). IEEE.

Marathe, A., & Kanage, R. (2024). Decrease in attention span due to short-format content on social media.

Naz, I., Murryam, L., & Kausar, N. (2025). Exploring University Student's Experience of Self-Regulation and Mental Wellbeing in Context of Short Form Social Media Engagement: Investigating the Challenges: https://doi. org/10.55966/assaj. 2025.4. 1.040. ASSAJ, 4(01), 21-37.

Xie, J., Xu, X., Zhang, Y., Tan, Y., Wu, D., Shi, M., & Huang, H. (2023). The effect of short-form video addiction on undergraduates' academic procrastination: a moderated mediation model. Frontiers in Psychology, 14, 1298361.

Ye, J. H., Wu, Y. T., Wu, Y. F., Chen, M. Y., & Ye, J. N. (2022). Effects of short video addiction on the motivation and well-being of Chinese vocational college students. Frontiers in Public Health, 10, 847672.