

Social Media Issues in Higher Education

Alex Price

Department of Higher Education, The University of Mississippi

EDHE 664

Dr. Kerry B. MeLear

November 18, 2025

Social Media Issues in Higher Education

Introduction

The year was 2012, a kid from Tyler, Texas, ushered Texas A& M University and its football program into the Southeastern Conference. The kid's claim to fame was that he beat the #1 football team in the nation, Bama, and tweeted "Down Goes Bama", which created the legend of Johnny Football and Heisman winner, quarterback, Johnny Manziel. Social media platforms like Twitter were in their infancy. However, that one game, along with Johnny becoming the youngest Heisman winner later that year, generated a social media impact that "produced more than 1.8 million media impressions, which translates into \$37 million in media exposure for Texas A&M" and its football program (Texas A&M University, 2013). Johnny Manziel's rise to fame demonstrates the rapid growth of social media platforms that increased visibility and branding in higher education while also presenting academic, social, mental health and institutional challenges.

Academic Issues

While social media can be a great tool for learning and student engagement, it can also be a distraction and can negatively impact student performance. According to the study, "The impact of social networking addiction on the academic achievement of university students globally: A meta-analysis" (2025), researchers found that "the students who used social networks too much had poorer academic achievement and lower concentration in the classrooms" (Salari, p. 5). Oftentimes, the excessive users on average have lower GPAs than their peers. Additionally, the algorithms used by the tech industry for platforms contribute to excessive usage and perhaps addiction. In the same study, the researchers found "that addiction to social networks hurts academic achievement by creating academic procrastination and increasing

academic stress” (Salari, p. 5). As a result, students lack time management skills, which are essential for being academically successful.

Social and Behavioral Issues

Social media plays a major role in how students interact on college campuses, influencing relationships, managing conflicts and just navigating college life. Case in point, during the Johnny Manziel era at Texas A and M University, neither the institution nor Johnny knew how to handle Johnny’s new fame. Johnny was this 19- or 20-year-old kid from east Texas that had celebrities like Drake, Lil Wayne, and Lebron James messaging him through Twitter, while the University was tasked with ensuring his safety at all times due to everyone wanting to be with him or wanting something from him. Initially, he had escorts to attend his in-person classes, but challenges of social media fame proved to be hard to manage, and Johnny was enrolled in on-line classes for safety. The social media presence also made him hypersensitive, and he had an extreme fear of failure. However, while reflecting on his behavior Johnny readily admits during an interview with Shannon Sharpe, by stating “that the way I behaved in the off season, what I was doing in my workouts and who I was as a team leader, coming back with a Heisman Trophy, that the program should have benched me, they should have suspended me”, demonstrating that his “Johnny Football” persona fueled by social media was challenging for both him as well as the University to manage (ESPN, 2024).

Mental Health Issues

College life offers flexible schedules for students, which can lead to limitless time spent on social media platforms. Having too much time can affect their mental health in a number of ways. The constant scrolling on the pages can cause feelings of loneliness, self-doubt or lack of confidence, sleep deprivation, and feelings of missing out on something, which shows up as

increased anxiety and depression in the student. A 2006 study on the impacts of Facebook among college students found “college-wide access to Facebook led to an increase in severe depression by 7% and anxiety disorder by 20%” (Walsh, 2022). This suggests that excessive use can lead to a student’s inability to cope mentally. To demonstrate further, *the Columbia Daily Tribune* reported on November 10, 2025, about a crime on the University of Missouri’s campus that a “University of Missouri student accused of strangling victim after being blocked on Snapchat” (Jawadi, 2025). This case is a great example of “fear of missing out” can lead to extreme behavior. Together, these examples illustrate that excessive usage of social media can lead to emotional instability and can be harmful to the student and the well-being of others.

Institutional Issues

In this day and age, social media platforms can negatively affect the public perception of colleges and universities. For example, during an on-campus protest on our campus in 2024, there was TikTok clip of one of our students making monkey gestures at another nonwhite student, which ranked up over five million views. The incident was covered nationally by all media outlets, causing the White House to condemn the behavior and the University to open an investigation into the students’ conduct (Gangitano, 2024). The prompt actions by the University were extremely important due to its painful history. It has been more than fifty years since the University accepted its first Black student, James Meredith. Since then, it has worked tirelessly to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all students. Incidents like this one undermine the goals and force the University to revisit its policies regarding protests, diversity training, and student conduct. As demonstrated by the incidence, social media platforms allow for the negative information to spread and containment is lost. Unfortunately, social media platforms have placed pressure on higher education institutions to respond and remedy

incidences because having such widespread exposure to any negative incidence can damage the reputation of the institution.

Conclusion

It is evident that social media can provide higher education institutions with learning, visibility and branding opportunities; however, those same platforms can also cause challenges for the universities, faculties and students. Studies have shown that extreme use can be a distraction for the students and adversely affect them academically, socially, and mentally. Constant engagement may influence harmful behavior with consequences, depression, and increased anxiety. For colleges, there are containment issues with it that can extend beyond the campus resulting in unwanted attention, which requires them to be extremely responsive and to plan carefully. Overall, social media is beneficial to higher education as it is great for student engagement, communication, providing academic resources, and networking.

References

- ESPN. (2024, February 22). *Johnny Manziel describes how he became 'Johnny Football' at Texas A&M* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibGki4h78LU>
- Gangitano, A. (2024, May 7). *White House: Sharing video of Ole Miss students mocking Black protester 'beneath any elected official'*. Yahoo News. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/white-house-sharing-video-ole-193943966.html>
- Jawadi, A. (2025, November 10). *Missouri student accused of strangling victim after being blocked on Snapchat*. USA TODAY Network. <https://www.usatoday.com/>
- Salari, N., Zarei, H., Rasoulpoor, S., Ghasemi, H., Hosseinian-Far, A., & Mohammadi, M. (2025). *The impact of social networking addiction on the academic achievement of university students globally: A meta-analysis*. *Public Health in Practice*, 9, Article 100584. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2025.100584>
- Texas A&M University. (2013, January 18). *End of football season produced \$37 million in media exposure for Texas A&M* [News release]. Texas A&M Stories. <https://stories.tamu.edu/news/2013/01/18/study-end-of-football-season-produced-37-million-in-media-exposure-for-texas-am/>
- Walsh, D. (2022, September 14). *Study: Social media use linked to decline in mental health*. MIT Sloan School of Management. <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/study-social-media-use-linked-to-decline-mental-health> mitsloan.mit.edu