



The Impact of Using Social Media at Different Age Groups on Task Completion

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Abstract. This study examines the differential impact of social media usage patterns on task completion across age groups. Drawing upon survey data from 104 respondents collected via an online questionnaire platform, the research analyses variations in usage duration, purpose, and perceived efficiency among four age cohorts (13–22, 23–35, 36–50, and 50+). The findings indicate significant generational disparities: younger participants report higher engagement levels and greater susceptibility to task interruption, particularly due to high-frequency notifications and short-form content, whereas older cohorts demonstrate more instrumental and regulated usage patterns associated with fewer perceived disruptions. Integrating empirical data with existing theoretical debates, the study supports the dual-nature framework of social media as both a facilitative and disruptive force in productivity. The results underscore the importance of age, usage intention, and self-regulation in mediating the relationship between digital engagement and task efficiency, contributing to broader discussions on digital behaviour and generational differences in contemporary media environments.

Keywords: Social Media Use; Task Completion; Generational Differences; Digital Distraction; Productivity; Self-Regulation; Media Behaviour

1 Introduction

In today's information-driven society, social media has become deeply embedded in people's daily lives. From adolescents to the elderly, individuals across all age groups frequently utilise platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, Instagram, and TikTok in their studies, work, and personal lives (Nguyen, L. et al. 2025)^[8]. However, alongside its widespread adoption, growing concerns have emerged regarding its impact on attention, time management, and task completion (Kapoor et al., 2017)^[4]. Some contend that social media facilitates communication and collaboration, even aiding users in organising tasks more efficiently; others, however, note its tendency to distract, leading to procrastination and diminished productivity. Consequently, the precise manner in which social media influences task completion across different age groups emerges as a significant question warranting exploration (Kapoor et al., 2017)^[4].

The core research question is: Do social media usage habits among different age groups exert differential effects on their task completion rates? This question holds significant academic and practical relevance. From a social science perspective, the topic spans multiple disciplines including psychology, sociology, and communication studies: psychology can elucidate the relationship between social media and attention allocation or multitasking; sociology aids in understanding the interplay between generational differences and digital lifestyles; while communication studies reveals how social platforms reshape daily behaviours through algorithmic recommendations and information flow.

Regarding this issue, two primary viewpoints exist within academia and society. One perspective posits that social media can function as a productivity tool, aiding users in timely information acquisition and enhancing collaborative efficiency. The opposing view emphasises that social media's immediacy and entertainment value more readily cause distraction and task interruption, particularly evident among younger demographics (Hizbul Khootimah Azzaakiyyah, 2023)^[2]. In reality, the relationship between social media and productivity is not unidimensional but fraught with tension (Hizbul Khootimah Azzaakiyyah, 2023)^[2].

Historically, social media has evolved over more than two decades. From Facebook's emergence in 2004, through Instagram's rise in 2010, to TikTok's widespread popularity in 2016, these platforms have continually reshaped how people communicate and accomplish tasks. Post-pandemic remote learning and working have further amplified social media's role in daily task management, sparking widespread debate on 'efficiency versus distraction' (Kapoor et al., 2017)^[4].

Consequently, this study aims to: through questionnaire surveys and data analysis, compare differences in social media usage across age groups and evaluate its impact on task completion. The research seeks to reveal generational disparities in usage patterns and efficiency, thereby providing valuable insights for educational institutions, workplace managers, and individuals. This will assist diverse groups in better balancing social media engagement with task fulfilment.

2 Methodology

This study employed a questionnaire survey method, utilising the Chinese online platform Wenjuanxing for data collection^[1]. This ensured efficient distribution and rapid retrieval of questionnaires while enhancing the convenience of statistical analysis^[1]. Compared to interviews or experiments, the questionnaire method offered significant advantages in this study, primarily in its broad coverage and strong comparability: it not only encompassed respondents across different age groups but also yielded quantifiable results through structured questions, thereby revealing the relationship between social media usage and task completion more intuitively. The research team, comprising three to four members, collaboratively designed and tested the questionnaire content. The questionnaire structure comprised three main sections: the first gathered demographic information—including respondents' age, gender, and occupational/student status—to facilitate grouped comparisons in subsequent analyses; the second assessed

social media usage habits, such as average daily usage duration, most frequently used platforms, and primary purposes (entertainment, study, work, or communication), enabling the research team to profile social media usage across different age groups; The third section assessed task completion, focusing on whether respondents were interrupted by social media while completing tasks, their satisfaction with their own efficiency, and their subjective judgement of social media's overall impact (positive, negative, or no significant effect).

The questionnaire was disseminated via social media groups, peer sharing, and online channels, ultimately yielding 104 valid responses spanning four primary age brackets: 13–22, 23–35, 36–50, and over 50. The findings revealed significant differences across age groups in perceived usage duration and task completion. Regarding usage time, adolescents aged 13–22 typically spent over four hours daily on social media. They frequently used these platforms while studying or completing assignments, making them most susceptible to distraction and procrastination. The 23–35 age cohort predominantly concentrated on 2–4 hours daily. Being in university or early career, they viewed social media both as an auxiliary tool for study and work whilst frequently devoting considerable time to its entertainment functions, resulting in markedly polarised attitudes towards efficiency; The 36–50 age group shows markedly reduced usage, with most spending under two hours daily. They predominantly utilise social media for information gathering and maintaining interpersonal connections, generally perceiving its impact on task completion as limited. The over-50s exhibit the lowest usage, typically employing it solely for family/friend communication or news browsing, thus experiencing negligible distraction issues.

Analysis reveals that age is the key factor influencing the relationship between social media usage and task completion. Although younger groups use it more frequently, they experience greater negative impacts, particularly from notifications, short videos, and instant messaging, which are perceived as primary distractions. Younger users oscillate between recreational and utilitarian usage, reflecting ambivalence. Middle-aged and older groups, however, exhibit more purposeful and restrained habits, significantly reducing efficiency disruptions. This disparity indicates that social media's effect on task completion is not uniform but varies across generations. Overall, the questionnaire data from this study validates the dual-nature hypothesis that social media can function both as an efficiency tool and a source of distraction, while further revealing differentiated trends across generations. These findings provide a robust empirical foundation for subsequent expert opinion syntheses and positional debates, while also offering valuable reference points for educational institutions, workplace managers, and individuals to reflect upon and optimise their social media usage habits.

3 Expert Opinion & Differing Viewpoints

Considerable authoritative research exists within academia exploring the impact of social media on task completion rates across different age groups. Professor Gloria Mark of the University of California, Irvine, has demonstrated that human attention spans have significantly shortened within digital environments. In her recent work, she notes

that frequent social media use and information interruptions cause individuals to switch tasks on average every 47 seconds. (Chen, Z., & Han, L. 2025)^[9]

. Such disruptions not only increase stress but also diminish overall efficiency (Mark, 2023)^[6]. Her conclusions align with this study's questionnaire findings: younger groups are more prone to distraction due to high-frequency use, while middle-aged and older groups experience less interference owing to lower usage rates.

However, academic perspectives on social media's role are not monolithic but encompass multiple distinct positions.

The first is a positive stance. Some researchers contend that social media can enhance efficiency under certain conditions, particularly in educational and learning contexts. For instance, Junco (2012) found that university students' engagement increased when using Facebook for course discussions, demonstrating social media's potential to facilitate information sharing and collaboration (Junco, R. 2012)^[3] For this group, social media is not merely a distraction but has the potential to become a tool supporting learning.

The second is a negative stance. Experimental research by psychologists Rosen et al. (2011) showed that when students constantly switched tasks between texting and social media during class, their academic performance and information retention significantly declined (Sun, W., & Chao, M. 2024)^[11]. This study corroborates the view that 'task interruptions diminish efficiency,' with the most pronounced negative effects observed among adolescents and young adults.

The third perspective is balanced. Kuss and Griffiths (2017) note that social media's impact is 'dual-natured': while it can help maintain social connections and alleviate loneliness, excessive use may lead to distraction, anxiety, or even addiction (Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. 2017)^[5]. They therefore emphasise that social media itself is not the decisive factor in efficiency; the key lies in users' purposes for engagement and their self-management capabilities (Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. 2017)^[5].

In summary, expert opinions and research findings indicate that social media may positively enhance task completion or negatively disrupt it, with outcomes contingent upon age, usage frequency, and purpose. The findings of this study corroborate these scholarly conclusions: younger cohorts are more susceptible to distraction, while middle-aged and older groups demonstrate greater self-control and a tendency towards instrumental use. The existence of differing perspectives reminds us that we cannot make sweeping generalisations about social media's role; rather, analysis must account for specific usage contexts and generational differences.

4 Conclusion

Analysis of 104 valid questionnaires revealed significant differences in social media usage habits and task completion rates across age groups. Adolescents and young adults exhibited the highest usage frequency, often engaging in multitasking by switching between academic or professional tasks and social media platforms. While this high-frequency use facilitates information acquisition and peer relationship maintenance, it simultaneously causes substantial distraction and procrastination, directly impairing

task efficiency. In contrast, middle-aged and older individuals exhibit markedly lower social media usage, primarily employing it as a tool for information retrieval or interpersonal communication, thus causing less disruption to task completion. This indicates that age and usage habits are crucial variables influencing the role of social media.

Compared to existing research, the findings of this study corroborate conclusions drawn by experts and scholars. Mark (2023) demonstrated that frequent digital interruptions significantly shorten attention spans, increase stress, and reduce efficiency, a pattern particularly pronounced in data from younger cohorts.(Mark, G. 2023)^[6] Rosen et al. (2011) also experimentally confirmed the detrimental impact of social media-induced task switching on academic performance(Rosen, L. D., Lim, A. F., Carrier, L. M., & Cheever, N. A. 2011)^[7]. Concurrently, Junco (2012) cautions that social media does not inherently cause disruption; it can facilitate learning and collaboration under specific conditions(Junco, R. 2012)^[3]. Kuss and Griffiths (2017) adopt a balanced perspective, emphasising that social media's impact hinges on usage intent and self-regulation(Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. 2017)^[5]. This aligns closely with the dual experience observed in this study, where some young participants acknowledged both positive benefits and distractions.

The significance of this research lies not only in revealing generational differences in social media usage and task completion but also in providing guidance for societal and educational practices. Firstly, educational institutions can develop more targeted usage guidelines and learning strategies for students of different age groups. For instance, they can assist adolescents in establishing healthy usage habits to reduce distractions caused by short videos or instant messaging (Chiossi, F., Haliburton, L., Ou, C., Butz, A., & Schmidt, A. 2023)^[10]. Emerging evidence using behavioral and eye-tracking methodologies suggests that short video consumption may disrupt cognitive processes such as event segmentation, further contributing to attentional challenges(Zheng, Y. et al. 2025)^[12]. Secondly, workplace managers may prioritise the judicious use of digital tools in training and management, encouraging staff to leverage social media's strengths in information sharing and collaboration while mitigating its disruptive effects. Finally, for individuals, these findings prompt reflection on personal usage patterns, particularly urging younger groups to strike a balance between entertainment and productivity while enhancing self-regulation.

In summary, social media presents a double-edged sword. It may function as a tool supporting efficiency or become a source of distracting interference. Different age groups exhibit markedly distinct experiences due to variations in usage frequency, purpose, and self-control. By integrating questionnaire data with expert insights, this study demonstrates that social media's impact on task completion is multifaceted, marked by tension and complexity. Future research may further explore platform-specific variations and usage differences across cultural contexts, or employ longitudinal methodologies to observe the long-term relationship between usage patterns and efficiency changes. Overall, the findings of this study not only enrich our understanding of the relationship between social media and efficiency but also provide valuable insights for both academia and practice.

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