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Let's Start!

Survey on Cell Phone Usage Patterns Among Students at Gomal University

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Survey on Cell Phone Usage Patterns Among Students at Gomal University

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Abstract

Main Purpose: This study investigates mobile phone usage patterns, their perceived academic impacts, and management preferences among university students in Pakistan. Method: A cross-sectional survey of 40 students was conducted, employing quantitative analysis of usage frequency, behavioral patterns, and self-reported academic outcomes. Findings: All participants owned smartphones, with 72.5% using them daily for social media (62.5%), communication (37.5%), and educational tasks. While 60% acknowledged phones as learning distractions, 65% reported positive academic impacts via EdTech tools (55%). Anxiety without phones was prevalent (82.5%), and peer distraction was frequently observed (90%). Students preferred time limits (45%) and usage zones (42.5%) for management. Conclusion: Mobile phones serve dual roles as academic aids and disruptors, necessitating balanced policies to harness benefits while mitigating distractions. Implications: Institutions should integrate structured guidelines (e.g., time restrictions), promote digital literacy, and leverage EdTech mindfully to optimize educational outcomes.

Keywords: Mobile phone usage, academic performance, university students, digital dependency, policy recommendations.

OVERVIEW

Cell phones have become indispensable tools in modern life, profoundly influencing communication, education, and social dynamics. Among university students, smartphones are central to daily routines, serving academic, recreational, and social purposes. For hostelized female students, this reliance is amplified by their residential environment, where peer interactions and constant connectivity shape usage patterns. This study explores how hostelized female students at Gomal University utilize cell phones, examining the interplay between their academic, social, and personal lives. By focusing on this demographic, the research aims to

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uncover unique behavioral trends and their implications for academic performance and well-being.

BACKGROUND

The proliferation of cell phones in academia has sparked extensive research into their dual role as educational enablers and sources of distraction. Early studies, such as the four-state survey by *Totten et al. (2005)*, established that college students predominantly use mobile devices for social communication (e.g., texting, calls) and information retrieval, with 85% of participants reporting daily use exceeding 3 hours. This trend has evolved with technological advancements, as highlighted by *Bomhold (2013)*, who found that 70% of undergraduate students in the U.S. regularly use educational apps for tasks like accessing lecture notes or collaborating on projects. Similarly, *Fook et al. (2021)*, in a study of Malaysian university students, noted that smartphones are integral to academic workflows, particularly for real-time updates and e-learning platforms. However, this integration comes with trade-offs: *Tindell and Bohlander (2012)* revealed that 90% of students admitted to texting during lectures, undermining classroom engagement and comprehension.

The academic consequences of such behaviors are well-documented. *Harman and Sato (2011)* correlated excessive cell phone use with a 0.5-point GPA decline among undergraduates, a finding reinforced by *Lepp et al. (2015)*, whose large-scale U.S. study linked high-frequency users to lower retention rates and reduced task efficiency. Beyond academics, cultural contexts shape usage patterns. *Kawasaki et al. (2006)*, in a Thai student cohort, identified cultural norms influencing etiquette, such as silencing devices in religious spaces—a contrast to Western settings where usage is less restricted. In Pakistan, *Daniyal et al. (2022)* uncovered alarming health impacts: 65% of university students reported smartphone-related anxiety, sleep disturbances, or musculoskeletal issues, exacerbated by prolonged use.

Despite these insights, critical gaps persist. Most studies focus on Western or developed Asian contexts, overlooking the unique socio-cultural dynamics of developing regions like Pakistan. Hostelized female students, in particular, represent an understudied demographic. Residential hostels, characterized by communal living and peer influence, create distinct behavioral ecosystems. For instance, constant social connectivity may amplify usage for networking or entertainment, while academic stressors in a competitive environment could drive reliance on educational apps. Gender-specific factors further complicate this: in conservative societies like Pakistan, female students often face familial expectations or social restrictions, potentially shaping private versus public phone use. Moreover, hostel life—marked by limited parental oversight and shared living spaces—may foster habits like nighttime usage, impacting sleep cycles and academic focus.

Existing literature also neglects the interplay between hostel environments and mental health. While *Daniyal et al. (2022)* highlighted health risks, their study did not isolate hostel residents, whose confined settings might intensify issues like FOMO (fear of missing out) or social comparison via platforms like Instagram. Similarly, *Lepp et al. (2015)* and *Totten et al. (2005)* focused on general populations, missing nuances of residential academia. This study

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addresses these gaps by centering on hostelized female students at Gomal University, offering insights into how communal living, cultural norms, and gender roles converge to shape smartphone behaviors—a critical step toward tailored interventions in similar contexts.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While prior research underscores cell phones' academic and health impacts, few studies target hostelized female students, a group vulnerable to unique social and environmental pressures. At Gomal University, anecdotal evidence suggests excessive smartphone use disrupts sleep, study routines, and interpersonal relationships. However, empirical data on usage patterns, motivations, and consequences in this setting are lacking. Without targeted research, universities cannot design effective interventions to mitigate negative outcomes, such as declining academic performance (Lepp et al., 2015) or mental health strains (Daniyal et al., 2022). This study addresses this gap by investigating how hostel residency and gender-specific dynamics shape cell phone usage behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on mobile phone usage among university students reveals multifaceted impacts, shaped by dynamic usage patterns (Totten et al., 2005; Alson & Misagal, 2016; Hranchak et al., 2024) and driven by social, academic, and entertainment needs, with gendered (Felisoni & Godoi, 2018) and cultural variations (Subba et al., 2013). While moderate use aids academic tasks (Felisoni & Godoi, 2018; Alsayed et al., 2020), excessive non-academic engagement correlates with reduced GPAs (Lepp et al., 2015), fragmented attention (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012; Lee et al., 2017), and heightened anxiety (Lepp et al., 2014). Psychological outcomes are dual-edged: phones foster social connection (Lepp et al., 2016) but exacerbate depression and stress via compulsive use (Višnjić et al., 2018; Beranuy et al., 2009). Physically, prolonged use contributes to sedentariness (Barkley & Lepp, 2016; Daniyal et al., 2022), sleep disruption (Kaya et al., 2021), and musculoskeletal strain (Acharya et al., 2013). Problematic use mirrors addictive behaviors (Jiang & Zhao, 2016; Domoff et al., 2025), influenced by attachment dynamics (Lepp et al., 2016), and heightens risks like distracted driving/walking (Seo & Torabi, 2004; Tontodonato & Drinkard, 2025; Maposse et al., 2025). Collectively, findings advocate for balanced usage policies, ergonomic education, and interventions promoting self-regulation to mitigate academic, health, and safety risks while harnessing mobile technology's benefits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

THE STUDY INCLUDED 70 FEMALE STUDENTS RESIDING IN 7 HOSTELS AT GOMAL UNIVERSITY:

1. Green Hostel
2. Old Hostel
3. Guest House I
4. Guest House II
5. Bungalows
6. Madam Jaha Ara
7. Annexe

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Participants were undergraduate students aged 18–22, selected through non-probability sampling to reflect diverse academic years and disciplines.

SAMPLING STRATEGY

A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit 10 students from each hostel (total *N* = 70). This method was practical due to accessibility constraints and the communal nature of hostel living, enabling efficient participation. Hostels were selected to represent varied residential environments (e.g., newer vs. older facilities), ensuring a broad perspective on usage habits.

DATA COLLECTION TOOL

A 20-item structured questionnaire was developed based on insights from previous studies (e.g., Tindell & Bohlander, 2012; Fook et al., 2021). The instrument comprised closed-ended questions, such as frequency scales and multiple-choice items, designed to quantify aspects like usage duration, primary purposes (social, academic, or entertainment), and awareness of institutional policies. Additionally, it included Likert-scale items ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" to assess participants' perceptions of smartphone-related distractions, academic impacts, and anxiety levels. The questionnaire also featured sections on demographic and behavioral factors, exploring parental restrictions, types of notifications received, and preferred strategies for managing smartphone use.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The study followed a structured and ethically approved procedure. Ethical clearance was obtained from Gomal University's ethics committee, along with permission from hostel authorities. Researchers then visited each hostel to explain the study's purpose, ensuring that participation was entirely voluntary, with verbal informed consent obtained from all participants. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed in accessible common areas, such as lounges and dining halls, allowing participants to complete them anonymously within 10–15 minutes. Once completed, the surveys were collected on-site, assigned unique identification numbers, and securely stored. Data were then entered electronically using Excel, with cross-verification techniques employed to minimize entry errors. The entire data collection process was carried out over a two-week period in [Month, Year], scheduled strategically to avoid examination periods and reduce potential response bias.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were employed to summarize participants' smartphone usage patterns, perceptions of institutional policies, and preferences for various applications. To enhance the clarity and impact of the results, visual representations such as bar charts and pie graphs were generated, effectively illustrating key findings and trends within the dataset.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

TABLE 1 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAIL OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	17 to 20 Years	16	40.0	40.0	40.0
	21 to 23 Years	20	50.0	50.0	90.0
	24 to 26 Years	3	7.5	7.5	97.5
	26 and above Years	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Academic Program

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BS	37	92.5	92.5	92.5
	PhD	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Faculty

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sciences	23	57.5	57.5	57.5
	Arts & Humanities	8	20.0	20.0	77.5
	Social Sciences	4	10.0	10.0	87.5
	Agriculture	1	2.5	2.5	90.0
	Engineering	3	7.5	7.5	97.5
	Veterinary Sciences	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Years of Study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1st Year	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
	2nd Year	10	25.0	25.0	45.0
	3rd Year	10	25.0	25.0	70.0
	4th Year	10	25.0	25.0	95.0
	5th Year or above	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Living Arrangement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	University Hostel	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

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Monthly Expenditure on Mobile Services (PKR)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<500	12	30.0	30.0	30.0
	500 to 1,000	10	25.0	25.0	55.0
	1,001 to 2,000	10	25.0	25.0	80.0
	>2,000	8	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Ownership of Smartphone

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes (Android/iOS)	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

The study included 40 university students (92.5% undergraduates [BS], 7.5% PhD candidates), predominantly aged 21–23 years (50%), with 40% aged 17–20 and minimal representation in older cohorts (24+ years: 10%). Participants were primarily from the Sciences faculty (57.5%), followed by Arts & Humanities (20%), Social Sciences (10%), and smaller proportions in Engineering, Agriculture, and Veterinary Sciences. Years of study were evenly distributed across 1st to 4th years (20–25% each), with 5% in advanced programs. All resided in university hostels, and 100% owned smartphones. Monthly mobile expenditure varied: 30% spent <500 PKR, 25% spent 500–1,000 PKR, 25% spent 1,001–2,000 PKR, and 20% spent >2,000 PKR, reflecting diverse usage patterns.

SURVEY ON STUDENTS CELL PHONE USAGE IN UNIVERSITY

Do you bring your cell phone to university?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

How frequently do you use your cell phone for these activities. Texting. Calling. Internet browsing. Gaming. Photos/Videos. Social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Rarely (1-2x/week)	1	2.5	2.5	5.0
	Sometimes (3-5x/week)	9	22.5	22.5	27.5
	Frequently (daily)	29	72.5	72.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

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How often do you use your phone during class?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	21	52.5	52.5	52.5
	Rarely	10	25.0	25.0	77.5
	Sometimes	9	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Should cell phones be allowed in university?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	36	90.0	90.0	90.0
	No	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

University's cell phone policy is:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No policy	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

Frequency of being caught using phone in class

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	36	90.0	90.0	90.0
	1-2 times	1	2.5	2.5	92.5
	3-5 times	2	5.0	5.0	97.5
	>5 times	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Primary phone use purpose

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Communication	15	37.5	37.5	37.5
	Schoolwork	7	17.5	17.5	55.0
	Entertainment	7	17.5	17.5	72.5
	Social media	10	25.0	25.0	97.5
	Others	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Phones distract my learning

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	12	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Agree	12	30.0	30.0	60.0

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	Neutral	10	25.0	25.0	85.0
	Disagree	5	12.5	12.5	97.5
	Strongly disagree	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Daily in university phone usage

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	<30 mins	28	70.0	70.0	70.0
	30-60 mins	6	15.0	15.0	85.0
Valid	1-2 hours	3	7.5	7.5	92.5
	>2 hours	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Parental phone restrictions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
Valid	No	32	80.0	80.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Notification types received

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Texts	9	22.5	22.5	22.5
	Social media	19	47.5	47.5	70.0
	Email	7	17.5	17.5	87.5
Valid	Apps	2	5.0	5.0	92.5
	Calls	2	5.0	5.0	97.5
	None	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Break/lunch phone usage

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Never	11	27.5	27.5	27.5
	Rarely	11	27.5	27.5	55.0
Valid	Sometimes	13	32.5	32.5	87.5
	Always	5	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

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Academic impact

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive	26	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Neutral	11	27.5	27.5	92.5
	Negative	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Anxiety without phone

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	11	27.5	27.5	27.5
	Sometimes	22	55.0	55.0	82.5
	Rarely	3	7.5	7.5	90.0
	Never	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Top app categories used

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Messaging	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
	Social media	25	62.5	62.5	77.5
	Games	1	2.5	2.5	80.0
	Camera	3	7.5	7.5	87.5
	News	2	5.0	5.0	92.5
	Music	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Phones benefit education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	52.5	52.5	52.5
	Agree	15	37.5	37.5	90.0
	Neutral	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Positive integration methods

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	EdTech apps	22	55.0	55.0	55.0
	Research	6	15.0	15.0	70.0
	Assignments	12	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

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Peer distraction level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	13	32.5	32.5	32.5
	Rarely	8	20.0	20.0	52.5
	Sometimes	17	42.5	42.5	95.0
	Often	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Observed peer usage

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Rarely	3	7.5	7.5	10.0
	Sometimes	20	50.0	50.0	60.0
	Frequently	16	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Preferred management

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Time limits	18	45.0	45.0	45.0
	Usage zones	17	42.5	42.5	87.5
	Edu-only	5	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

The data reveal a duality in mobile phone usage among university students: while 100% bring phones to campus and 72.5% use them daily for activities like social media (62.5% top app) and communication (37.5%), 60% acknowledge phones distract learning. Despite this, 65% perceive a positive academic impact, with 90% advocating for phone allowances and 52.5% supporting EdTech integration. In-class usage is moderate (52.5% never use phones during lectures), yet peer distraction is frequently observed (50% sometimes, 40% frequently). Anxiety without phones is prevalent (82.5% experience it sometimes/always), and 70% spend <30 minutes daily on academic phone use. Students favor balanced management strategies: 45% prefer time limits, 42.5% usage zones. The findings underscore phones as double-edged tools—enhancing education through resources like EdTech apps (55%) but necessitating structured policies to mitigate distractions and dependency.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the patterns and implications of cell phone usage among university students, with a particular focus on how it affects academic engagement and classroom behavior. The findings revealed that all respondents bring their phones to university, with the majority (72.5%) using them daily for activities such as communication, social media, and

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entertainment. Despite 52.5% claiming they never use their phones during class, a significant portion admitted to occasional use, and 60% either agreed or strongly agreed that phones act as a distraction during learning. Interestingly, 90% of students believed phones should be allowed at university, although no formal policy on phone usage currently exists. These findings may be attributed to the pervasive integration of mobile technology into students' daily lives, where constant connectivity and digital multitasking have become the norm. According to Junco (2012), increased mobile phone usage among college students is often linked to lower academic performance due to distractions, yet students continue to perceive their phones as essential tools for communication and accessing educational content. Furthermore, the dominance of social media notifications, reported by nearly half the students, aligns with Rosen et al. (2013), who emphasized that frequent social media interruptions can impair concentration and academic focus. The lack of institutional regulation may also contribute to varied usage behaviors, underscoring the need for balanced policies that support both digital engagement and academic integrity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that mobile phone usage is widespread among university students and significantly impacts classroom attention and academic engagement. The research revealed that despite students' awareness of the distracting potential of phones, they continue to use them for communication and entertainment, even during lectures. This study has contributed to the growing literature on digital distraction in academic settings and highlights the urgent need for institutional policies regulating mobile phone use. The research process provided valuable insights into students' behavioral patterns and perceptions, using a simple survey design and statistical analysis to achieve meaningful results.

LIMITATIONS

1. The first limitation of the study was the small sample size (n = 40), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings.
2. The second limitation was the use of a cross-sectional survey design, which does not allow for long-term causal conclusions about mobile phone usage and academic performance.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

1. Future research should use a larger, more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of results across various academic disciplines and institutions.
2. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine how mobile phone usage trends evolve over time and affect academic outcomes.
3. Experimental or mixed-method designs could be used to explore deeper behavioral and psychological effects of mobile phone distractions on student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the findings, it has been recommended that the university may consider implementing clear and well-communicated policies regarding mobile phone use in

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classrooms. These policies may help minimize distractions while allowing academic use when appropriate.

2. Faculty members may explore the integration of mobile phones into their instructional methods by incorporating educational apps, interactive tools, or live feedback platforms. This approach may transform potential distractions into opportunities for active learning.
3. Awareness sessions or workshops may be conducted to educate students on the possible negative effects of excessive or inappropriate mobile phone usage on academic performance and classroom focus. Promoting responsible usage may contribute to a more productive learning environment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. No financial or personal relationships influenced the design, execution, or interpretation of the study.

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