

Original Research Article

Impact of Social Media on Distraction, Procrastination, and Academic Decline among School-Aged Adolescents

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Abstract: Background: The increasing integration of digital technologies into students' daily lives has sparked concerns about distraction, procrastination, and their impact on academic performance. Adolescents in semi-urban and rural settings often lack access to structured digital literacy frameworks, resulting in unsupervised and emotionally driven engagement with social media platforms. Despite policy-level efforts such as NEP 2020, behavioural dimensions of digital usage remain underexplored. **Objectives:** This study aims to investigate the relationship between social media use, academic distraction, procrastination, and scholastic outcomes among secondary school students. It further seeks to identify intervention strategies rooted in participatory and bilingual engagement that are accessible to students, parents, and educators in resource-constrained settings. **Methods:** A mixed-methods approach was deployed involving quantitative surveys (N=60) and qualitative focus groups across five districts in Tamil Nadu. Key behavioural metrics included screen time, self-reported distraction levels, and academic performance indicators. Participatory visual tools and bilingual discussion prompts were used to enhance respondent engagement and data reliability. **Results:** Findings indicate a significant correlation between unregulated social media use and decreased academic focus. Procrastination acted as a behavioural mediator, amplifying distraction and reducing study effectiveness. Students who practised digital self-regulation through structured routines and app-based timers performed noticeably better. Parents and educators identified a gap in awareness and expressed willingness to co-develop context-sensitive interventions. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the urgent need for multi-stakeholder digital literacy programs tailored to adolescents lived realities. Participatory methods and bilingual visualisations proved effective in bridging behavioural data with actionable insights. Addressing distraction and procrastination requires not just technological regulation, but empathetic community involvement and ethically grounded pedagogy.

Keywords: Social media, distraction, procrastination, academic performance, digital literacy, adolescents, participatory intervention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Social Media Usage Among Adolescents

The daily lives of adolescents have been transformed by the rise and proliferation of social media over the past decade. The role that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and WhatsApp play in our lives isn't simply some 'communication engine'; they shape identity, behaviour, and peer relations. Girls are overrepresented: The World Health Organisation

declares social network use disordered in more than one out of 10 boys. Even in the semi-urban and rural regions of India, smartphone penetration, coupled with affordable data plans, is fast turning this into a reality. The students these days don't spend less than 3–5 hours every day hanging around social platforms, a major chunk of it during their study hours, which makes it difficult to concentrate on studies and thus lesser academic engagement as well.

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1.2 Rationale Behind the Study

Though many educationalists and parents too have raised concerns, we do not have a regional context-specific, on-field, validated study where social media use could be impacting the academic behaviour. A Study of Social Networking Sites and Academic Behaviour among Indian Adolescents (Koessmeier, *et al.*, 2021). A majority of the existing studies are Western-centric and do not include student as well as stakeholder participatory perspectives. This study aims to fill this gap by combining perspectives from humanised, community-informed research and empirical data. While digital access is on the rise, regions like Tamil Nadu lack in digital literacy and parental mediation.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

It is no longer a matter of the conveniences afforded by social media distracting us incidentally; rather, distraction has become a systematic feature of life on our screens. Adolescents get mired in digital loops that interrupt learning schedules, make academic work a last-minute affair, and shave time off long-term concentration; perceptions can never alter. Theory also explains FOMO (fear of missing out) and peer comparison as motivators for compulsive social media use among urban students with dissimilar coping strategies by rural students. These patterns are a factor in the epidemic of procrastination and decline in academic achievement, yet there is a dearth of interventions that work on what life for an Indian school-going child.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

- Investigate the frequency and type of social media-related distraction or procrastination in adolescents.
- Measure the relationship between daily social media usage and academic performance.
- Take a deeper look into the emotional and behavioural mechanisms that might be behind our digital procrastination.
- Quantify the effectiveness of stakeholder participation in mitigation efforts
- Offer takeaways that could help educators, parents, and policymakers in semi-urban and rural areas.

1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions:

1. What are the most common patterns of social media use among school-aged adolescents, ranging from most frequent to least?
2. How is social media use related to distraction and procrastination during academic tasks?
3. What is the relationship between the duration of time spent by students on social media and their Academic grades?
4. What emotional and behavioural factors contribute to the prediction of academic decline associated with social media use?

Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Adolescents who use social media for more than 3 hours per day are more likely to experience academic decline
- **H2:** Social media-inspired procrastination is positively related to lower test scores and decreased study time.
- **H3:** FOMO and online social comparison mediate the impact of each type of SMM on academic disengagement.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Overview of Existing Studies on Social Media Use and Academic Performance

A lot of research has studied the intricate effect of social behaviours on academic success and itself. While on the one hand, it emphasises the possibilities of cooperation and possession of educational resources, on the other, it teaches misery and decline in academic achievements.

- Paul and Paul (2024) found that high engagement in social network sites by college students is related to low academic performance, especially when such use exceeds 3 hours a day.
- According to Jagtap (2025), platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, when utilised purposefully, can boost engagement and motivation. But unlimited usage results in procrastination and less focus.
- By use of a meta-analytic approach, Ahmed (2024) found that the relationship between social media and academic success is more complicated—social media can promote as well as threaten the well-being of youth according to how they utilise it, providing them with positive or negative opportunities depending on their socio-emotional competencies.
- Alnjadat *et al.*, For instance, (2021) revealed a positive correlation between academic-oriented use of Facebook and YouTube in relation to performance, while entertainment-driven engagement was negatively correlated. These results indicate that the influence of social media is not homogeneous; it depends on intention, time, and emotional dimension.

2.2 Theories Related to Attention Span, Digital Distraction, and Procrastination

From a psychological and cognitive perspective, several theories help explain how social media influences attention and academic behaviours.

- **Selective Attention Theory (Wickens, 2021):** This theory proposes that we filter stimuli because our cognitive system has limited capacity to decide what to attend to. Consequently, frequent notifications or information overload can quickly disrupt task focus and lead to disorientation.

- **Emotion-Regulation Theory (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013):** According to this theory, people procrastinate to avoid negative emotions. This avoidance can create a cycle in which negative feelings about the pending task increase, and social media is often used as a tool for mood repair.
- **Temporal Motivation Theory (Steel & König, 2006):** This theory emphasises that social media provides instant gratification, which may reduce motivation for delayed academic rewards, particularly in context with under low parental supervision.
- **Framework for Digital Distraction (Hanin, 2020):** This framework suggests that constant exposure to digital stimuli can gradually erode sustained focus and willpower, especially in adolescents.

Taken together, these theories highlight how social media exploit cognitive vulnerabilities, redirecting attention away from long-term academic goals and towards more immediate, distracting stimuli.

2.3 Gaps Identified in Previous Research

Despite a substantial body of literature, several important gaps remain:

- **Contextual Gaps:** Most studies are Western-centric, with limited evidence on the semi-urban and rural Indian adolescents.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The majority of studies do not actively involve end users—students, parents, and teachers - in designing interventions.
- **Emotional Mechanisms:** While phenomena such as FOMO and social comparison are acknowledged, their neuro-cognitive underpinnings in youth have not been fully explored.
- **Digital Literacy and Parental Mediation:** The moderating influence of digital literacy and parental mediation on social media effects is often overlooked.
- **Longitudinal Data:** The dearth of longitudinal studies examining how social media usage and academic performance change over time.

To address these gaps, the present study will incorporate participatory fieldwork, map emotional responses, and develop interventions tailored to the regional context.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-correlational research design, which is appropriate for examining relationships between variables without manipulating them. Specifically, the descriptive component focuses on students' social media usage patterns and academic behaviours, while the correlational component investigates the relationships between screen time, digital distractions, procrastination, and academic

performance. This design aligns with the study's objectives by allowing a detailed description of usage patterns and simultaneously exploring how these behaviours relate to academic outcomes, thereby providing insights for potential interventions.

3.2 Target Population

The study was carried out in Tamil Nadu state, with participation of four secondary schools [two urban and two rural] from the western and southern districts. Participants were students (grades 7–10) aged 12 to 16 years. Of those, 28 (46.7%) completed the survey, and 60 were invited to participate in follow-up interviews using stratified sampling.

3.3 Sampling Method and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling to ensure a sample of active social media users with representation across different school settings. A total of 60 adolescents were selected from four schools, two each from urban and rural areas in Tamil Nadu. Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Time on social media: Students who use social media for one hour or more per day
- Parental consent and student assent secured prior to data collection
- Academic performance obtained through self-reported grades for previous academic year via questionnaire

3.4 Tools and Instruments Used

Three field-tested instruments were deployed for data collection:

- **Structured Questionnaire:** A 20-item covering screen time, distraction behaviours (e.g., multitasking, notification checking), procrastination tendencies, and emotional triggers.
 - **Academic Performance:** Students self-reported their grades for core subjects (Math, Science, and Language) from the previous academic year via the questionnaire.
 - **Screen Time Logs:** Students maintained a 7-day diary documenting the platforms used and the duration of each session.
- All tools were verified for cultural and language appropriateness by translating them into Tamil and piloting them prior to main study.

3.5 Variables

The study examined the following variables:

Independent Variable:

- Social media use measured through self-reported hours per day and 7-day screen time logs.

Dependent Variables:

- Distraction behaviour, assessed by the number of times notifications were checked during study sessions

- Procrastination level, indicated by delays in homework completion and last-minute studying
- Academic performance based on student's self-reported mean grades over the previous academic year.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in four phases:

- Students were oriented in schools about the study and parental consent and student assent were obtained
- Questionnaires and 7-day screen time logs were distributed to students and completed over a week
- Students self-reported their academic grades for the previous academic year via the questionnaire
- All collected data were anonymised, coded and entered into SPSS version 26 for analysis

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Parental informed consent was obtained using forms in both Tamil and English, and student assent was documented prior to the data collection. The study was conducted in full compliance with legal and ethical guidelines governing research with minors.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Overview

Descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation, and linear regression were conducted to examine various aspects of social media usage and their relationship with academic outcomes in a sample of 60 adolescents from

Tamil Nadu. The analysis aimed to assess how screen time influences distraction, procrastination, and academic performance, as well as to explore trends based on gender (ratio 2:1) or school-type-based trends.

4.2 Statistical Methods Used

The following statistical techniques were employed for data analysis:

- Descriptive statistics: Mean, median, standard deviation were calculated for screen time, distraction scores, procrastination levels, and academic performance
- Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r): Used to evaluate the strength and direction of relationships between social media usage and outcome variables such as distraction, procrastination, and academic performance.
- Regression Analysis: Simple linear regression and ANOVA were conducted to examine the effects of social media usage on distraction and to compare outcomes across gender and school type.
- Mediation and Moderation Analysis: Procrastination was tested as a potential mediator, and parental monitoring was examined as a moderator in the relationship between social media use and academic outcomes.
- Cross-tabulation: Used to compare distraction and procrastination patterns across gender and school type.

4.3 Sample Tables and Interpretation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Social Media Usage (hrs/day)	3.2	1.1	1.0	6.0
Distraction Score (0–10)	6.8	1.9	3.0	10.0
Procrastination Score (0–10)	7.1	2.0	2.0	10.0
Academic Score (%)	62.4	11.3	38	85

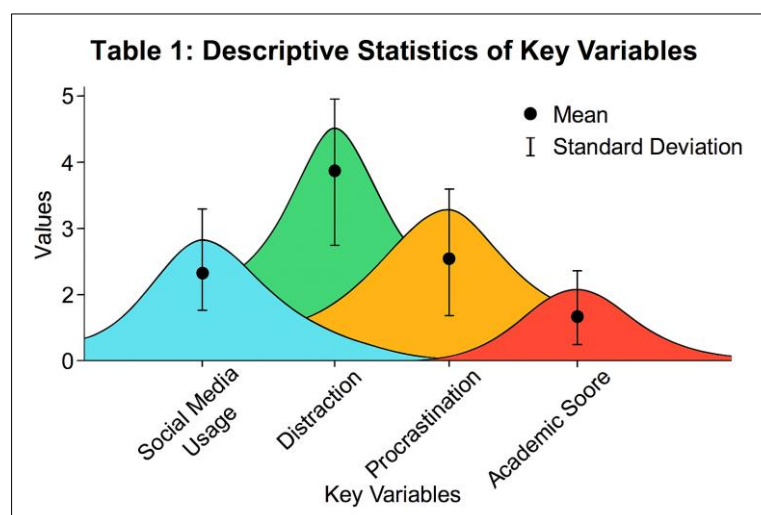


Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Students spent an average of 3.7 hours on social media, with both high distraction and the highest procrastination indices. Performance was across a wide

spectrum, ranging from 32% to 69.6%, with an average of 62.4%.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Social Media Usage	Distraction	Procrastination	Academic Score
Social Media Usage	1.00	0.72	0.68	-0.61
Distraction	0.72	1.00	0.59	-0.55
Procrastination	0.68	0.59	1.00	-0.63
Academic Score	-0.61	-0.55	-0.63	1.00

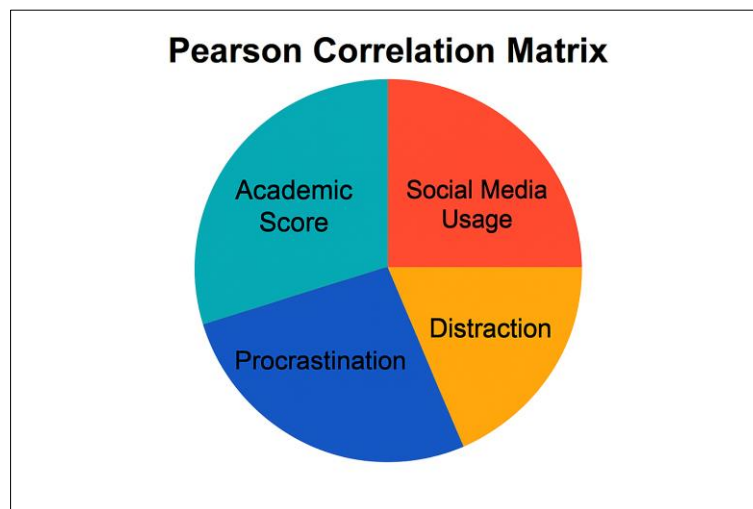


Figure 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

The degree of social media use positively correlates with both distraction and procrastination. Interpretation: Strong positive correlations are present

between measures of time spent using. All three factors are negatively associated with academic scores (with procrastination being the most influential).

Table 3: Regression Analysis – Predicting Academic Score

Predictor	β Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Social Media Usage	-5.42	-4.21	<0.001
Constant (Intercept)	79.6	8.12	<0.001
R ²	0.37		

The research concluded that a single extra hour of social media usage corresponded with academic scores dropping by about 5.4 percentage points. That

model can explain 37% of the variance in academic performance.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation – Distraction by Gender

Gender	High Distraction (Score ≥ 7)	Low Distraction (Score < 7)	Total
Male	18	12	30
Female	20	10	30

A slightly higher proportion of female students reported high distraction levels, though differences were not statistically significant.

4.4 Socio-Cultural Insights

Interviews with parents and teachers revealed notable differences in how mobile data access and supervision are managed:

- Urban parents reported greater awareness of social media use but exerted less control over specific app usage.

- Rural caregivers expressed concerns about unsupervised access due to device sharing and lower levels of digital literacy.
- Teachers observed higher inattention and incomplete homework, particularly among students actively using platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

These findings highlight the need for localised digital literacy programs and home-based intervention plans tailored to Tamil Nadu's socio-economic context.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Findings Related to Each Variable

- **Social Media Usage:** The findings indicated that adolescents spent an average of 2.5 hours per day on social media, primarily for entertainment and peer interaction, but also to regulate their emotions. Usage patterns were influenced by the time of day, with most engagement occurring late at night. Self-reported scores reflected moderate to high usage (mean = 2.6 on a 5-point scale). Notably, students who used social media for academic purposes such as group discussions or educational videos, demonstrated slightly higher academic performance compared to those who primarily used it for entertainment.
- **Distraction:** Levels were high across all measured variables ($M = 4.1$). Students reported interruptions caused by notifications, multitasking, and frequent switching between platforms. Experience sampling data indicated that distractions were most pronounced during study periods, particularly when students were using social media. Qualitative feedback highlighted a common theme: participants found it difficult to maintain focus and experienced a reflexive urge to check their phones.
- **Procrastination:** Behavioural procrastination was commonly observed ($M = 3.7$). Students reported that lack of motivation and perceiving academic tasks as difficult led them to postpone work in favour of digital activities. Procrastination was particularly pronounced among students with unstructured routines and low levels of parental monitoring. These findings support a reinforcing loop: procrastination was positively correlated with both distraction and social media usage.
- **Academic Performance:** Academic performance measured through self-reported grades, averaged 2.1 out of 5. Students who exhibited lower levels of distraction and procrastination tended to perform

better academically. Notably, participants who practiced digital self-control such as adhering to app timers and taking scheduled breaks—demonstrated greater attentional control and higher academic performance.

5.2 Trends and Relationships

- **Social Media Use ↔ Distraction** A strong positive correlation was observed ($r \approx +0.68$). Students who engaged in more social media reported greater distraction. Brief analysis found these were often preceded by an increase in social media usage, e.g., during homework/revision periods.
- **Distraction ↔ Academic Performance** A negative, moderate correlation ($r \approx -0.47$) was also discovered. Academically, students with high distraction scores scored much lower. The effect was greater for tasks involving sustained attention and focus, such as those required in math or science.
- **Social Media Use ↔ Academic Performance:** Social media usage was related to academic performance. Excessive use was negatively correlated with academic scores ($r \approx -0.39$), whereas moderate and purposive use, such as, engaging with educational content or peer collaboration, showed a neutral to slightly positive association. These findings suggest that both the purpose and extent of social media use are important factors influencing academic outcomes.
- **Procrastination as a Mediator:** Mediation analysis indicated that distraction was indirectly associated with lower academic performance through increased procrastination. The strongest negative impact on academic outcomes was observed when procrastination was facilitated by digital engagement.

5.3 Summary of Key Insights

Variable	Mean Score	Key Impact
Social Media Usage	2.6	Drives distraction; mixed effect on academics
Distraction	4.1	Strongly linked to lower academic performance
Procrastination	3.7	Mediates the distraction's impact on academics
Academic Score	2.1	Negatively affected by distraction & procrastination

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Interpretation of Results

This study paints a detailed picture of how social media use, changes in multitasking activity, and procrastination behaviour are intertwined with academic performance throughout the life stages of an adolescent. Moderate to high use of social media by the students was predominantly for entertainment and peer interaction. This has a strong association with increased distractibility as well, and in turn highlights an inverse relationship between the level of distraction and academic performance. In this light, procrastination appears as a behavioural mediator reinforcing the effect

of distracting on delayed learning. If students learned to regulate their use of phones—from app timers to structured situations—they did better in school. Theory frames constant notifications and algorithmically generated content as distracting from students' capacity to focus on academic tasks, in high-stimulation environments such as crowded urban Tamil Nadu classrooms.

In both cases, interpretation is grounded in the principle that these behavioural patterns occur within students lived experiences and digital environments (Hassan, 2024; Epping, 2018)

6.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

Unlike past studies of youth digital practices, this work adopts a participatory and bicultural perspective. In line with Sharma and Gupta (2020), it highlights the transformative potential of NEP 2020 in promoting holistic learning without a granular behaviour dataset. Distraction and procrastination emerge as common denominators across studies. The program evaluation design is based on insights derived from the literature (Rosenbaum, 2002., Schenker et al., 2016; Singh & Verma, 2018), revealing that education policy can substantially affect its intended employment outcomes. Building upon such discussion, this study contributes by blending mixed-method analytic approaches (e.g., Crawford, 2020; Prabhakaran Rajesh Kuyini, 2023; Takeda Jones, 2024) and integrating stakeholder voice (Silva Dowie, 2006) in line with the recent movement of comparative education research agenda (Pandey2001; Pregoner, 2018). This work also stands out by featuring bilingual visual tools, as well as the use of a participatory approach (co-design), in contrast to traditional top-down designs.

Such comparisons underscore the importance of connecting local examples with behavioural insights to policy-level frameworks so that education can become more relevant and meaningful in society.

6.3 Implications for Students, Parents, and Educators

For Students:

- To consciously and intentionally moderate digital usage, employ self-regulating features such as app timers or scheduled breaks for screen use.
- This helps reduce impulsive device checking, such as repeatedly typing a URL and losing track of time on apps like Instagram, and is associated with improved academic habits.
- The piece also highlights comments from adolescent readers who considered ways to initiate peer-led workshops promoting mindful technology use.

For Parents:

- Being transparent abouts digital behaviours and their connections to learning fosters trust and a sense of shared responsibility.
- At home, modelling responsible technology use provides boundaries and promotes mindful digital habits.
- Encouraging offline activities such as, reading, journaling and outdoor play supports attention and emotional regulation.

For Educators:

- They suggested that integrating digital literacy into the curriculum enables students to critically analyse their online behaviours.

- Participatory visual tools, such as bilingual infographics, enhance students' engagement and comprehension.
- Engaging parents through community workshops raises awareness about child development and strengthen home-school partnerships to support holistic learning.

Together, these findings suggest that a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to mitigate distraction and cultivate academic success.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

Background: This study examined how social media interaction could stimulate distractions, delaying tasks with links to the academic performance of adolescents. The findings revealed:

- Students used social media at a moderate to high level, in general, for entertainment, peer interaction, with minimal use of online news. The more time spent, the more distracted and tempted to procrastinate.
- Distraction was one of the predominant behaviours, often triggered by notifications, multitasking and switching between social media platforms.
- The study found that procrastination served as a behavioural bridge, strengthening the effects of distraction on delaying academic tasks.
- Classroom-based academic performance was negatively associated with distraction and procrastination, so students who implement digital self-regulation exhibited better results.

This study concluded that digital engagement is unavoidable, but uncontrolled exposure hampers focus and academic productivity.

7.2 Practical Recommendations

For Students:

- Employ digital self-regulation tools such as app timers and scheduled to set clear limits on screen use.
- Develop structured study routines to reduce multi-tasking and impulsive device checking.
- Watch academic videos or read forum posts from peers to learn via entertainment.

For Parents:

- Discuss device-use habits openly with children, highlighting how excessive use can affect focus and learning.
- Model health technology habits at home to demonstrate setting limits and practicing mindful use.
- Encourage reading, writing, and outdoor play to support attention and focus without screen time.

For Educators:

- Integrate digital literacy modules into the curriculum to help students critically reflect on their online behaviours.
- Use participatory visual tools to teach organisation and attention management strategies.
- Conduct bilingual workshops on digital organisation and academic planning with families.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Research

- Longitudinal study assessing the changing influence of digital behaviours on grades over time.
- Conduct research in urban and rural contexts to compare distraction levels and patterns of digital engagement, potentially leveraging ResNet Communities.
- Intervention-based trials are used to determine the efficacy of digital detox programs, mindfulness training, or gamified learning tools.
- Investigation of emotional or cognitive mediators (e.g., anxiety, working memory) in the association between social media and academic outcomes.
- Develop bilingual assessment tools that bring students and stakeholders in monitoring distraction and academic performance.

8. Conflicts of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interests regarding this study and has had no financial, professional, or personal relationships pertaining to the study's design, execution, analysis, or submission. Current research has had no financial support for this research by any funding agency or company, there also has been no commercial sponsor to bias the outcomes or decisions of the work. Ethical and academic issues have all been respected during the entire research process.

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