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**FEATURE**

**Motivational Beliefs, Social Media Addiction,  
and Interpersonal Communication Skill  
Among International Students in Thailand**

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**Abstract.** *Student motivation in terms of academics continues to be a problem in education while there is a growing use of social media and an apparent decline in interpersonal skills. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the associations that social media addiction and interpersonal communication skills have with motivational beliefs among international students in Thailand. Using a cross-sectional survey design (n = 98), the results indicated that social media addiction has a negative relationship with motivational beliefs while interpersonal skills has a positive relationship with motivational beliefs. The final model with social media addiction and interpersonal communication skills explains 27% of the variance of motivational beliefs. This indicates that teachers may want to exercise caution with student use of social media while also considering ways to foster interpersonal communication skills in their classrooms.*

**Keywords:** social media addiction; motivational beliefs, communication skills Thailand

**Introduction**

Student motivation or a lack thereof is still a concern in education as approximately 40% of students lack motivation (Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, 2003). In addition, 69% of high school dropout stated that they were not motivated to learn (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Motivation worsens as the students grow older as well (Jason, 2017).

Related to the concerns with motivation have been a demand among employers for workers with interpersonal skills as well as an explosion in the use of social media (Go-Global, 2014; Shakir, 2009). Employers are expecting employees to have interpersonal competency as well as other soft skills upon entering the workplace (Hernández- March, Peso, & Leguey, 2009; Omar, Manaf, Mohd, Kassim, & Aziz, 2012). Furthermore, poor interpersonal skills, such as the inability to attentively listen, can affect engagement or motivation to learn in an academic context (Thomas, 2010, 2017).

In relation to social media, there are over two billion active social media users representing almost 30% of the planet's population (Go-Global, 2014). In addition, college age young adults spend on an average of two hours a day on social media and one in five of them stated that they cannot go more than a few hours without checking social media, which indicates signs of addiction (Go-Global, 2014). Symptoms of social media addiction include loss of time, headaches, sleep problems, and avoidance or lack of motivation to do work. Furthermore, social media addiction can cause interpersonal problems such as guilt, anxiety, isolation, depression, and agitation (PsychGuides, 2018). These evidences indicated that social media addiction may be linked negatively with interpersonal skills and motivation. There are studies that have indicated that within Thailand social media addiction, motivation and interpersonal skills are a problem yet, these constructs have not been examined in a single study (Hengsadeeikul, Koul, & Kaewkuekool 2014; Leesa-Nguansak, 2018).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationships among academic motivation, social media overuse, and interpersonal skills. Understanding the relationship of social media addiction with both motivation and interpersonal skills can be useful for educators and parents who are trying to determine if it is necessary to address the use of social media among young adults in an academic setting.

### **Literature Review**

The focus of this study is to understand the role social media addiction and interpersonal skills explain the variance of motivational beliefs. The following sections explores theoretical background of the three factors of this study.

#### **Motivational Beliefs**

Motivational beliefs are the thoughts or values that encourage some forms of action in the behavioral response, and serve as indicators of the motivation an individual has as he or she perceives it (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). There are several theories of motivation such as self-determination theory and goal-related theory. Self-determination theory is a meta-theory that explains a person's motivation in terms of their autonomy, competence, and relatedness (interpersonal skills) as indicated by Ryan and Deci (2000). Goal-related theory states that the

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development of purpose through the setting of goals provides motivation (Locke & Latham, 2002). Generally, the goals need to be long-term and mastery oriented for the best results in terms of learning (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014; Fadlelmula, Cakiroglu, & Sungur, 2015).

Motivation, as determined through goal setting, has been strongly linked with academic performance in science, technology, and math subjects (Buckley & Doyle, 2016; Kingir, Tas, Gok, & Vural, 2013; Seo & Taherbhai, 2009). Classroom experiences also have an effect on student motivation to continue studying certain subjects such as math (Wang, 2012). For example, failure in a course can lead to a shift in the goals that are set and thus, changes in motivation (Seo & Taherbhai, 2009). This is critical as learning goals have been linked with motivation for academics (Valle et al., 2015)

Specifically, in technology, it has been found that gamification enhances the academic performance but a mediating factor is whether the motivation is extrinsic or intrinsic (Buckley & Doyle, 2016). Intrinsic motivation has also been linked with high academic performance (Fadlelmula et al., 2015). This indicates that the source of motivation is another factor to consider.

Parents and teachers also play a role in motivation. As parents focus on the performance goals for their children, it led to a disconnection between the home and the school (Madjar, Shklar, & Moshe, 2016). Teachers who communicated achievement-related messages to the students have been found to be positively linked with student motivation which means that an increase in achievement messages is associated with an increase in student motivation (Gray, Chang, & Anderman, 2015). In addition, teachers who are more emotionally supportive at the beginning of the year had students who were more motivated at the end of the year (Ruzek et al., 2016). However, emotional support from the teachers was not as effective as that from the parents in another study in terms of motivation (Song, Bong, Lee, & Kim, 2015).

Several studies on motivation have been conducted in Thailand. Hengsadeeikul et al. (2014) found that instrumental goals were the primary motivation of the students who enrolled in graduate programs that use English as the medium of instruction. Ye (2016) found that in terms of learning Chinese, female students have higher motivation than males and Thai-Chinese have higher motivation than Thai students. This indicates that the relevancy of the subject as well as cultural background may be factors in motivation.

### **Social Media**

Social media is content created by the individuals for the purpose of sharing over the internet in the form of text, videos, or pictures, commonly on a specific platform such as Facebook (Evans, 2012). Social media addiction is defined as a person's inability to avoid the use of social media for more than an hour (Hope,

2018). Symptoms of social media addiction include psychological symptoms such as defensiveness, euphoric feelings when using social media, and inability to keep time as well as physical symptoms such as weight gain, backaches, and strained vision (PsychGuides, 2018). The primary channels through which people use social media are computers and smartphones (Jeong, Kim, Yum, & Hwang, 2016).

Social media addiction has been linked with such interpersonal problems as inability to develop closeness with others, depression, loneliness, and shyness (Bian & Leung, 2015; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012; Yao & Zhong, 2014). In addition, social media addiction has been found to affect conversation quality which is a component of interpersonal skills (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012). Bian and Leung (2015) found that the overuse of social media can affect the ability to develop social capital, which is the network of relationships people have and which grow through the use of interpersonal skills. Social media overuse has also been negatively linked with self-esteem and social-connectedness (Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Savci & Aysan, 2017).

Social media use through the smartphone can also have dire consequences. People who use their smartphones for social media were found to be more likely to be addicted to their smartphone (Jeong et al., 2016). Smartphone addiction can have all of the same negative effects as social media addiction including depression, anxiety, loss of sleep, and other mental disorder symptoms (Andreassen et al., 2016; Demirci, Akgonul, & Akpınar, 2015). Gender, personality type, and the age of first use have all been found to be factors that affect smartphone addiction and perhaps, social media addiction (Boumosleh & Jaalouk, 2017; Demirci et al., 2015).

Another issue with the social media use, as it pertains to students, is the link with academic performance. Academic performance may also be affected by social media use depending on how the data is collected. For example, students are convinced that social media use does not affect their academic performance (Ozer, Karpinski, & Kirschner, 2014). In addition, another study found a positive relationship between Facebook use and academic performance (Ainin, Naqshbandi, Moghavvemi, & Jaafar, 2015). However, Samaha and Hawi (2016) found that at least smartphone addiction is negatively related with academic performance. If students use their smartphone for social media use, it is possible that social media use can also affect their performance academically. Lau (2017) found that social media use specifically for non-academic purposes was negatively correlated with academic performance.

Thailand is an avid user of social media and ranks eighth on the planet in terms of Facebook users (Leesa-Nguansak, 2018). One study in Thailand found that the use of Facebook among adult employees led to lower mindfulness and higher emotional exhaustion (Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol, 2016). This may indicate that social media addiction as defined through the use of Facebook could be detrimental for students who often need to be motivated to excel academically.

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**Interpersonal Skills**

Interpersonal skills are the skills people use to interact and communicate with people daily (Sellnow, 2002). These skills include verbal and non-verbal such as speaking, writing, listening, and even body language (Owens, 2012). Several theories have tried to explain the reason behind interpersonal behavior and communication. Social exchange theory states that relationships are developed based on a cost-benefit analysis (Baker, 2001). Cognitive dissonance theory attempts to explain how people react to the information they receive through relationships in that people will try to minimize information that causes internal mental conflict (Wicklund & Brehm, 2013).

Several studies have associated interpersonal skills with academic performance. Students with better speaking skills have been found to achieve higher test scores (Marschark, Shaver, Nagle, & Newman, 2015). Hebert and Hauf (2015) found that service learning improves interpersonal skills but does not have a relationship with academic performance. Among medical students, it was found that emotional intelligence, a form of interpersonal skills, did not predict performance in medical courses (Libbrecht, Lievens, Carette, & Cote, 2014). These studies indicated mix results when associating interpersonal skills and academic performance.

There are several other benefits of interpersonal skills. People with interpersonal skills have been found to be less likely to experience burnout, depression, or anxiety (Pereira-Lima & Loureiro, 2015). Furthermore, face-to-face communication has been found to lower depression when compared to the communication through Facebook (Wright et al., 2013). As such, developing interpersonal skills and interacting with people in reality may also help students with burnout and depression.

There is also a push within Southeast Asia for college graduates to have interpersonal skills. Shakir (2009) stated that Malaysia is calling for graduates to have soft skills and that these need to be part of the curriculum of tertiary schools. In addition, a lack of these skills has been found to limit graduates' employability (Omar et al., 2012).

Based on the review of literature, the following questions were developed for this study.

1. What are the university students' perceptions of their motivational beliefs, social media use, and interpersonal communication skills?
2. Is there a difference in motivational beliefs, social media use, and interpersonal communication skills based on demographics (gender & student status) among university students?
3. What is the association of motivational beliefs with social media use, interpersonal communication, gender, and student status among university students?

### **Methodology**

An explanation of the process by which the research questions are answered is provided in this section. The sample, setting, research design, data collection, and data analysis are discussed

### **Sample**

The sample of this study was taken from one international school located in Bangkok, Thailand. A total of 98 respondents participated. Stratified sampling was used based on gender. The demographics of the study are as follows: 54% of the respondents were male and 46% were female. For student status, 59% of the respondents were Thai and 41% were international students. For the class level, majority of the students were Seniors at 72%; Juniors were 20% of the sample, followed by Sophomores at 3%, and lastly Freshmen at 4%. Data for the class level was collected only for descriptive purposes and was not used for further analysis.

### **Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey was used. The survey had 40 items in all. Teachers were asked to administer and collect the surveys at each school. The survey was divided into two parts. Part one of the survey addressed the demographic information of the respondents. Part two was the survey items that addressed interpersonal skills, social media use, and motivational beliefs. All variables were measured with a five-point Likert scale with 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Agree*, and 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

### *Motivational Beliefs*

The motivational belief scale was adopted from Pintrich De Groot (1990). Sample items include "I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new

things.” and “I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting.” The Cronbach alpha for the 22-item scale was .83.

#### *Social Media Use and Integration*

The social media use and integration scale was adopted from Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013). Sample items include “I get upset when I cannot log into Facebook.” and “I enjoy checking my Facebook account.” The Cronbach alpha for the 10-item scale was .91.

#### *Interpersonal Communication Skills*

The interpersonal communication scale was adopted from Learning Dynamics (2002). Sample items include “In conversation, do you tend to do more talking than the other person does?” and “After the other person is done speaking, do you clarify what you heard them say before you offer a response?” The Cronbach alpha for the 8-item scale was .70.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive data was analyzed by the calculation of the mean and standard deviation for the items on the survey. T-test was conducted to determine if there were differences based on gender or student status for the variables of this study. Lastly, the correlation was calculated among the variables as well as the regression analysis to determine the strength of the association with the motivational beliefs as the dependent variable and social media integration, communication skills, gender, and student status as the independent variables.

### **Results**

For motivational beliefs, the respondents of this study indicated that they are neutral in terms of their motivation toward academics ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ , 95%CI [3.22, 3.53]). In particular, respondents disagreed that they were “so nervous during a test that they could not remember the facts they learned” ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ , 95%CI [2.34, 3.00]) and they were neutral when “[they] think that what [they] are learning in class is interesting” ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ , 95%CI [2.78, 3.37]). However, respondents agreed with the statement that “understanding my studies is important to me” ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ , 95%CI [3.73, 4.22]) and with the statement “it is important for me to learn what is being taught in class” ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ , 95%CI [3.49, 4.02]).

For social media use and integration, the respondents indicated that they primarily disagreed with the statements showing over-reliance on social media ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ , 95%CI [2.30, 2.85]). For example, respondents stated that they “feel disconnected from friends when [they] have not logged into Facebook”

( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ , 95%CI [1.80, 2.47]) and that they “prefer to communicate with others mainly through Facebook” ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ , 95%CI [1.87, 2.61]). However, the respondents were neutral towards the statements “I enjoy checking my Facebook account” ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ , 95%CI [2.51, 3.26]) and “I don't like to use Facebook” ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ , 95%CI [2.81, 3.51]).

Respondents were mostly neutral towards statements about interpersonal communication skills ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ , 95%CI [2.93, 3.25]). Statements the respondents showed the strongest disagreement towards include “it is difficult for me to see things from the other person's point of view” ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ , 95%CI [2.12, 2.84]) as well as “I find myself not paying attention while in conversation with others” ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ , 95%CI [2.57, 3.26]). Respondents did agree with the statements “In conversation, I can easily tell the difference between what the person is saying and how he/she may be feeling” ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ , 95%CI [3.40, 3.95]) and “In conversation I often try to figure out what the other person is going to say before he or she has finished talking” ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ , 95%CI [3.34, 3.90]).

For differences based on the demographic variables gender and student status, no difference was found for motivational beliefs by gender conditions;  $t(91) = -0.69$ ,  $p = 0.49$  or student status conditions;  $t(84) = 0.51$ ,  $p = 0.61$ . For social media addiction, a significant difference was found based on gender, males ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) and females ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) conditions;  $t(95) = -2.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . However, no difference was found based on student status conditions;  $t(70) = 1.04$ ,  $p = 0.30$ . Lastly, for interpersonal communication skills, no difference was found by gender conditions;  $t(94) = -0.65$ ,  $p = 0.51$  or student status conditions;  $t(77) = 0.55$ ,  $p = 0.58$ .

The Pearson Product Correlation was calculated for motivational beliefs, social media integration, and interpersonal communication skills. There was no significant relationship found between motivational beliefs and social media addiction ( $r = -.07$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p = 0.47$ , 95% CI [-.27, .13]). However, significant weak positive relationship was found between motivation beliefs and interpersonal communication skills ( $r = .23$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI [.03, .41]) and a moderate positive relationship between social media addiction and communication skills ( $r = .36$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , 95% CI [.18, .52]).

Multiple regression analysis was used to explain the variance of motivational beliefs based on the independent variables of social media integration, interpersonal communication skills gender, and student status. The results of the regression indicated the three independent variables that explained 27% of the variance ( $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(3,92) = 8.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2_{adjusted} = .24$ ). It was found that social media addiction significantly explained the variance of motivational beliefs ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .10$ ), as did interpersonal communication skills ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, gender was not a significant explanatory variable of motivational beliefs ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p = .22$ ) nor was student status ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $p = .76$ ). Table 1 provided the

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means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables of this study. Table 2 offered the regression results. The results in brackets were the bootstrap ( $N=1000$ ,  $n = 92$ ) 95% confidence intervals for the intercepts, independent variables, and  $r^2$ :

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with Confidence Intervals

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Social Media	2.57	0.90		
2. Motivational Beliefs	3.38	0.44	-.07 [-.27, .13]	
3. Communication Skills	3.09	0.51	.23* [.03, .41]	.36** [.18, .52]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ .

Table 2  
Regression Coefficient Results

	Estimate ( <i>b</i> )	Std. Error	t	p-value
(Intercept)	2.40 [1.70, 2.83]	0.26	8.60	< 0.01
Social Media Integration	-0.14 [-0.25, -0.03]	0.04	-3.13	< 0.01
Communication Skills	0.44 [0.27, 0.61]	0.08	5.36	< 0.01
Gender: Male	0.10 [-0.14, 0.18]	0.08	1.22	0.22
Student: Thai	0.02 [-0.06, 0.26]	0.08	0.31	0.76
				$R^2 = 0.27$ [0.11, 0.42]

### Discussion and Conclusions

The significant findings of this study are as follows. First, there was no difference found by gender or student status for the independent variables. The only exception was social media addiction with women disagreeing more with the statements than men. This difference by gender is consistent with Boumosleh and Jaalouk (2017) and also with Demirci et al. (2015). This can mean that perhaps men are more forthcoming about their addiction towards social media and that women are denying their addiction to social media which is consistent with addictive behavior (Dare & Derigne, 2010).

A second finding was the moderate positive correlation between social media addiction and interpersonal communication skills. At an intuitive level, this association makes sense as social media is used mainly for interpersonal communication skills (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). However, the scale employed in this study focused on conversational skills and assessed such things as completing other people's sentences and inferring the emotional tone of someone's voice. These are skills hard to replicate through chatting and posting likes on a social media site. There is a relationship between social media addiction and interpersonal skills but it is weaker than would be assumed perhaps because the platforms for communication are slightly different in nature. Interacting through social media is like the non-verbal communication that is associated with traditional interpersonal interaction.

A third finding is that the relationship that motivational beliefs has with social media addiction and interpersonal communication skills is weak at the bivariate level. However, social media addiction and interpersonal communication skills explain almost 30% of the variance of motivational beliefs. When signs of social media addiction increase, there is a corresponding slight decrease in motivational beliefs which contrasts with Ainin et al. (2015) who found a positive relationship but is consistent with Samaha and Hawi (2016) who found a negative relationship. This decrease seems reasonable as literature point to the negative psychological impact of social media addiction (Andreassen et al., 2016; Demirci et al., 2015).

In addition, when communication skills increase there is an increase in motivational beliefs which is consistent with Marschark et al. (2015) but in contrast with Hebert and Hauf (2015). This finding adds to the debate of the mixed results that have looked at this association (Hebert & Hauf, 2015; Libbrecht et al., 2014; Marschark et al., 2015). The lack of clarity may be in the difficulty of measuring motivation which can be highly fluid in nature.

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be derived from this study. First, the overuse of social media can be detrimental in terms of motivation about academics. This means that teachers may want to avoid encouraging the use of social media even for educational purposes. This is in contrast to others who support social media use in education (Davis, 2015). However, the risk of overuse negates the benefits at least at times of using social media.

Second, teachers should consider integrating into their instructional approach teaching methodologies that utilized interpersonal skills. Examples include classroom discussion and opportunities for interactive learning (Thomas, 2010). Discussion develops interpersonal skills and has already been found to be associated with motivational beliefs in this study. The value of social media is in relation to its connection with social constructivism (Churcher, Downs, & Tewksbury, 2014). Through navigating the learning experience together in an online platform, teachers may be able to provide learning in a context relevant to students in the 21st century.

Third, curriculum developers may want to consider to incorporate social media into the development of curriculum. This could include such concepts as ethical concerns with social media use, cyberbullying, and helping students and even teachers who may not be digital natives (Poore, 2015). Bloom's taxonomy can also be considered as a tool for developing objectives and or learning activities that incorporate social media (Bosman & Zagenczyk, 2011).

For further study, it would be beneficial to study the distinctions between online communication and interpersonal communication. This study looked at social media addiction in terms of addiction and interpersonal communication skills but communication also happens online but lacks the characteristics of traditional interpersonal communication. Therefore, studying the different forms of communication and their association with motivation could help explain what approaches to communicating are most helpful for students.

In addition, a study that looks at actual social media behavior rather than an individual's perception of their behavior would yield results that may be potentially more accurate. This could include measure time online, click rate, or sentiment analysis of comments.

The correlational nature of this study means that it lacks the ability to conclude any form of cause and effect between the independent and dependent variables in the model. In addition, the results are derived from a sample taken from one university. Therefore, generalizability is limited to a similar context.

The purpose of this study was to explain motivation beliefs through its relationship with social media integration, interpersonal communication, gender, and student status. The relationship between motivational beliefs and social media addiction was negative while the relationship between motivational beliefs and

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communication skills was positive. This indicates that social media addiction needs to be considered with care while strengthen interpersonal communication skills may be beneficial due to the positive association.

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