

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 8; Issue 5; May 2025; Page No. 537-541

Received: 07-02-2025
Accepted: 11-03-2025

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Purpose of using social media before and during COVID-19 by students

¹Preeti Rani, ²Dr. Jatesh Kathpalia and ³Kanta Sabharwal

¹Ph.D Scholar, Department of Sociology, COBS&H, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India

²Assistant Scientist, Department of Sociology, COBS&H, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India

³Senior District Extension Specialist, Department of Home Science, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Mandkola, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2025.v8.i5h.1937>

Corresponding Author: Preeti Rani

Abstract

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social media was steadily growing and had already become a key aspect of everyday life for individuals across all age groups. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat were widely used for staying in touch, sharing content, and staying informed. At the same time, businesses and organizations had begun to fully embrace social media as a valuable tool for marketing and engaging with their audiences. This period marked a slow but steady move toward greater online interaction and digital connectivity, effectively laying the groundwork for the crucial role social media would play during the pandemic and in the years that followed. This study was planned to investigate the purpose of use of the social media before and during the COVID-19 pandemic by students. Data was analyzed by applying z-test and it was found that there was a significant shift in usage pattern before and during pandemic. This study also enlightens the complexity of factors influencing the purpose of using social media before pre pandemic landscape of digital engagement.

Keywords: Social media, COVID-19, digital, purpose and entertainment

1. Introduction

With the advancement of the technological era, web-based services like social media have enabled individuals to maintain social connections beyond cultural and geographical boundaries. The term *social media* combines *social*, referring to interactions through information sharing, and *media*, which indicates the tools (such as the internet) that facilitate such interactions. Thus, social media can be defined as web-based applications that play a central role in content sharing and communication.

In recent years, studies have shown that adolescents constitute the majority of social media users (Calancie *et al.*, 2017) ^[1]. Among adolescents, students represent a significant portion, often spending their unstructured time on various social media platforms. The proliferation of electronic devices such as smartphones and laptops has made it easier for students to access social media for a wide range of purposes (Gupta & D'Silva, 2020) ^[2].

In 2019, India ranked as the second-largest country in the world in terms of internet users, closely following China. According to reported data, there were approximately 573 million internet users in India that year. This number was projected to rise to around 639 million by 2020, highlighting the rapid growth of internet adoption in the country. Furthermore, Indian users reportedly spent an average of 2.4 hours per day and 17 hours per week on social media (Varun, 2019) ^[3]. These statistics underscore the prominent role of social media in the daily lives of Indian internet users

and reflect the country's growing digital engagement. As reported by Statista.com, India's status as the second-largest online market illustrates the significant influence of the internet within its digital landscape.

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought the world to a standstill, enforcing global lockdowns that resembled scenes from a fantasy film. During this period, social media played a crucial role in connecting individuals confined to their homes. It not only helped students continue their studies remotely but also served various other purposes. Social media became an inseparable part of daily life during and after the pandemic, showcasing its positive impact on students and society at large.

However, the increased usage of social media also exposed its darker side, particularly among students. Several studies have highlighted the physical and psychological issues linked to excessive social media use (Valkenburg *et al.*, 2009; Wanajak, 2011; Bhargava & Rani, 2015; Utz & Breuer, 2016; Singh *et al.*, 2017; Saini *et al.*, 2019; Ngien & Jiang, 2021; Ayyıldız & Şahin, 2022; Dhiman, 2022) ^[4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12]. So, this study was targeted to find out the mean comparison between the purpose of using social media before and during COVID-19. It is widely acknowledged that post-COVID-19, the use of social media has expanded in unprecedented ways.

2. Material and Methods

A sample of 300 students was selected from two districts of

Haryana, Hisar and Karnal. Among them, 75 students were from school and 75 from colleges from both districts. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire along with interviews conducted with the selected students. The questionnaire was designed to assess the impact of social media on students from farming families, with a specific focus on the purpose of using social media before and during COVID-19 crisis. The collected data was analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, including frequency and percentage for distribution and z-test was applied for mean comparison.

3. Results

Among 300 respondents, 39.7% were male while remaining 60.3% were female respondents (Table 1). Respondents were categorized into 3 groups based on age, 50% of respondents belongs to age group of 14-17 years, 30.7% respondents belong to age group 18-21 years and the last age group 22-25 years contained 19.3% respondents (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender and Age-wise distribution of respondents (n=300)

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Age	14-17 Years	150	50%
	18-21 Years	92	30.7%
	22-25 Years	58	19.3%
Gender	Male	119	39.7%
	Female	181	60.3%
	Transgender	00	00%

Data also revealed that 67.7% of respondents belong to nuclear families and remaining 32.3% belong to joint families as shown in figure 2.

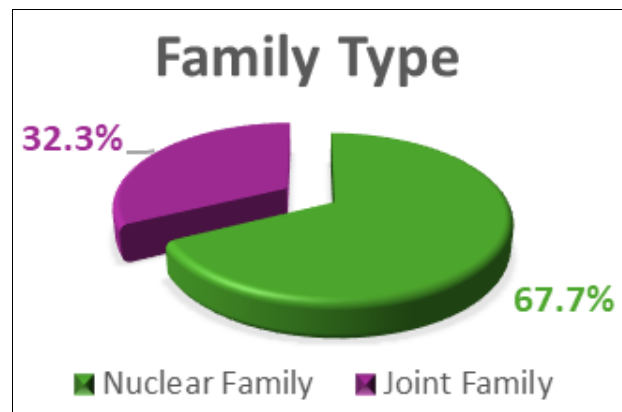


Fig. 2: Family type of respondents.

Social media platforms have played a crucial role in fostering connections among people, enabling easy communication with friends, family, and colleagues. These platforms allow users to exchange messages, share life updates, and engage in interactive conversations. Beyond communication, social media has also become a popular source of entertainment, offering diverse content such as videos, memes, photos, and articles.

Table 2: Purpose of using social media before COVID- 19 (n=300)

Sr. No.	Purposes	Variable	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Entertainment	For watching movies/Videos	159(53.0)	71(23.6)	70(23.4)
		Gossiping or aimless browsing	115(38.3)	94(31.3)	91(30.4)
		Online gaming	46(15.4)	114(38.0)	140(46.6)
2	Enhance learning and knowledge	Online learning	104(34.6)	98(32.7)	98(32.7)
		Learning new recipe for cooking	51(17.0)	116(38.6)	133(44.4)
		Having virtual meetings with classmates	54(18.0)	95(31.6)	151(50.4)
		News and current affair	92(30.6)	69(23.0)	139(46.4)
		Improving English	57(19.0)	82(27.4)	161(53.6)
3	Social purpose	Expressing and Sharing thoughts and opinion	49(16.4)	89(29.6)	162(54.0)
		To interact with friends and family	146(48.6)	96(32.0)	58(19.4)
		Participating in community activity	41(13.6)	86(28.7)	173(57.7)
		Writing blogs on social problems and current issue	38(12.6)	55(18.4)	207(69.0)
		Findings new & old friends	149(49.6)	103(34.4)	48(16.0)
4	Other purposes	Searching job	36(12.0)	74(24.6)	190(63.4)
		Sharing information, files, photos and documents	167(55.6)	80(26.7)	53(17.7)
		Online shopping	142(47.4)	96(32.0)	62(20.6)
		For earning	39(13.0)	101(33.6)	160(54.0)

Table 2 and 3 highlights the various reasons respondents used social media, categorized into four main purposes:

entertainment, enhancing learning and knowledge, social interaction, and other uses.

Table 3: Purpose of using social media during COVID- 19 (n=300)

Sr. No.	Purposes	Variable	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Entertainment	For watching movies/Videos	195(65.0)	75(25.0)	30(10.0)
		Gossiping or aimless browsing	195(65.0)	65(21.7)	40(13.3)
		Online gaming	106(35.3)	112(37.3)	82(27.4)
2	Enhance learning and knowledge	Online learning	240(80.0)	30(10.0)	30(10.0)
		Learning new recipe for cooking	81(27.0)	106(35.3)	113(37.7)
		Having virtual meetings with classmates	120(40.0)	86(28.7)	94(31.3)
		News and current affair	120(40.0)	65(21.7)	115(38.3)
		Improving English	87(29.0)	63(21.0)	150(50.0)
3	Social purpose	Expressing and Sharing thoughts and opinion	40(13.3)	98(32.7)	162(54.0)
		To interact with friends and family	180(60.0)	86(28.7)	34(11.3)
		Participating in community activity	32(10.7)	64(21.3)	204(68.0)
		Writing blogs on social problems and current issue	42(14.0)	55(18.3)	203(67.7)
		Findings new & old friends	170(56.7)	98(32.7)	32(10.6)
4	Other purposes	Searching job	46(15.3)	84(28.0)	170(56.7)
		Sharing information, files, photos and documents	239(79.7)	31(10.3)	30(10.0)
		Online shopping	182(60.7)	46(15.3)	72(24.0)
		For earning	49(16.3)	108(36.0)	143(47.7)

Table 4: Mean comparison of purpose of using social media before and during COVID-19

Sr. No.	Categories	Variable	Before	During	Z value
			Mean $\pm$ Standard Error	Mean $\pm$ Standard Error	
1	Entertainment	For watching movies/Videos	2.29 $\pm$ 0.047	2.55 $\pm$ 0.038	4.13**
		Gossiping or aimless browsing	2.08 $\pm$ 0.047	2.51 $\pm$ 0.041	6.90**
		Online gaming	1.68 $\pm$ 0.041	2.08 $\pm$ 0.045	6.36**
2	Enhance learning and knowledge	Online learning	2.02 $\pm$ 0.047	2.70 $\pm$ 0.037	11.29**
		Learning new recipe for cooking	1.72 $\pm$ 0.042	1.89 $\pm$ 0.046	2.65*
		Having virtual meetings with classmates	1.67 $\pm$ 0.043	2.08 $\pm$ 0.048	6.25**
		News and current affair	1.84 $\pm$ 0.049	2.01 $\pm$ 0.051	2.42*
		Improving English	1.65 $\pm$ 0.04	1.79 $\pm$ 0.049	2.03*
3	Social purpose	Expressing and Sharing thoughts and opinion	1.62 $\pm$ 0.043	1.59 $\pm$ 0.041	0.50
		To interact with friends and family	2.29 $\pm$ 0.044	2.48 $\pm$ 0.039	3.23*
		Participating in community activity	1.56 $\pm$ 0.04	1.42 $\pm$ 0.039	2.33*
		Writing blogs on social problems and current issue	1.43 $\pm$ 0.040	1.46 $\pm$ 0.042	0.45
		Findings new & old friends	2.33 $\pm$ 0.042	2.46 $\pm$ 0.039	2.12*
4	Other purposes	Searching job	1.48 $\pm$ 0.040	1.58 $\pm$ 0.042	1.64
		Sharing information, files, photos and documents	2.38 $\pm$ 0.044	2.69 $\pm$ 0.037	5.47**
		Online shopping	2.26 $\pm$ 0.045	2.36 $\pm$ 0.048	1.50
		For earning	1.59 $\pm$ 0.040	1.68 $\pm$ 0.042	1.52

In the entertainment category, before COVID-19, over half of the respondents (53%) reported using social media primarily to watch movies and videos. This was followed by 38.3% who used it for casual browsing and gossip, while only 15.4% used it for online gaming. During COVID-19, however, 65% of respondents used social media primarily for entertainment, especially for watching movies and videos. An equal percentage (65%) also reported using it for casual browsing and gossip, while 35.3% engaged in online gaming within the entertainment category.

Under the learning and knowledge enhancement category, before COVID-19, 34.6% of respondents engaged in online learning through social media, while 30.6% used it to stay updated on news and current events. A smaller proportion 19% used it to improve their English language skills, and a notable 53.5% disagreed with the idea that social media was effective for improving English. During COVID-19, however, a significant 80% of students used social media for online learning. Additionally, 40% utilized it to access news, stay informed about current affairs, and participate in virtual meetings with classmates. A smaller group 29% used

social media to improve their English skills, although 50% still did not believe it was effective for that purpose.

In terms of social interaction, before COVID-19, nearly half (48.6%) of respondents used social media to connect with friends and family, while 16.4% used it as a platform to express their thoughts and opinions. During COVID-19, however, more than half of the respondents (60%) used social media to stay connected with friends and family. Meanwhile, only 14% reported writing blogs on social issues, and 13.3% used social media as an outlet to express their thoughts and opinions.

Lastly in the other purposes category, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half (55.6%) of respondents used social media for sharing files, photos, documents, and information. Around 47.4% used it for online shopping, while only 13% engaged in online earning activities. During the pandemic, these numbers increased, with 79.7% of respondents using social media to share information, files, photos, and documents. Additionally, 60.7% used it for online shopping, while 16.3% engaged in online earning activities.

3.1 Mean Comparison of Social Media Usage Purposes Before and During COVID-19

Table 4 presents a comparison of the mean scores related to the purposes for using social media before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purposes were categorized into four main groups: entertainment, enhancing learning and knowledge, social interaction, and other uses. The analysis revealed significant differences across all categories when comparing usage before and during the pandemic. Notably, the categories of entertainment and enhancing learning and knowledge showed higher mean values and statistically significant increases, indicating that these purposes became more prominent during the pandemic in comparison to social and other purposes, which showed relatively lower mean differences.

4. Discussion

Social media platforms have played a significant role in fostering interpersonal connections, offering a convenient medium for communication with friends, family, and colleagues. These platforms have enabled the seamless exchange of messages, sharing of updates, and participation in meaningful conversations. Additionally, social media has become a popular source of entertainment, providing a wide variety of content, including videos, memes, photos, and articles.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students faced numerous challenges, with social isolation being one of the most significant. In this context, social media became a vital tool for fulfilling various needs and reducing the emotional impact of isolation. A trend was also observed in India between 2018 and 2021 (Khan *et al.*, 2022) [13].

The data collected offers valuable insights into the various purposes for which students utilize social media. These purposes were broadly classified into four categories: entertainment, enhancing learning and knowledge, social interaction, and other uses.

Entertainment remained a dominant reason for social media use. Under this category, 53% of respondents indicated they primarily used social media for watching movies and videos, followed by 38.3% who used it for casual browsing and gossiping, while only 15.4% reported using it for online gaming. These findings align with the study, where 70.9% of respondents used social media for entertainment purposes (Ezumah 2013) [14]. During COVID-19 a significant change observed under entertainment category where 65% of students reported usage for watching movies and videos. About 60% also used these platforms to maintain connections with friends and family, highlighting the importance of social media in preserving social bonds during periods of physical separation. Additionally, 40% relied on social media to stay informed about COVID-19-related developments.

Under the category of learning and knowledge enhancement, 34.6% of respondents used social media for online learning, and 30.6% accessed it for news and current affairs. These results mirror past findings (Bhargava and Rani, 2015 and El-Berry, 2015) [6, 15], which noted a connection between social media use and academic engagement. However, only 19% of students used social media to improve their English skills, while 53.5% disagreed with its effectiveness for this purpose.

The data observed for the same category during COVID-19 differs significantly from the pre-COVID situation. A count of 29% students used social media to enhance their English skills, only 13% used it to express their thoughts and opinions. These findings are supported by past study (Altam, 2022) [16], who reported that users increasingly turned to social media to expand their vocabulary and improve spoken English. Interestingly, 10.7% of students participated in community activities via social media, and 14% engaged in writing blogs on social issues.

Lastly under the categories of social interaction and other purposes, 48.6% of respondents reported using social media to communicate with friends and family, while a smaller group, 16.4%, used it to express and share personal thoughts and opinions. Additionally, 55.6% of respondents used social media to share files, photos, and documents. These findings are consistent with studies (Junco *et al.*, 2010; and Sunar *et al.*, 2018) [17, 18], which emphasized the role of social media in communication and information sharing. Nearly half of the respondents also reported using social media to reconnect with new and old friends. Furthermore, 47.4% engaged in online shopping, while only 13% utilized social media for online earning activities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, aligning with the earlier findings (Manjunatha, 2013; Omotayo and Salami, 2018) [19, 20].

During COVID-19, online learning emerged as a major trend, with 80% of students using social media for educational purposes, supporting findings on the academic use of social media platforms. Simultaneously, 65% of respondents admitted to using social media for gossip and casual browsing, indicating a blend of both productive and leisurely activities. Virtual meetings also became part of the social media experience, with 40% of students using these platforms for that purpose, although 31.3% expressed disagreement regarding their usefulness. Moreover, 15.3% of students used social media to search for jobs, highlighting its growing role in professional networking.

The collaborative aspect of social media was reflected in the 79.7% of students who used it to share files, information, and photos. 56.7% used it to connect with both new and old friends, echoing findings on the role of platforms like Facebook during lockdowns (Limaye *et al.*, 2022) [21]. The shift toward e-commerce was evident, with 60.7% engaging in online shopping, and 16.3% using social media for online income opportunities. Additionally, 35.3% used it for gaming during the pandemic period.

Social media has proven to be a multifaceted tool, supporting communication, entertainment, learning, and professional engagement. The data reveals a wide spectrum of uses, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, highlighting the platform's adaptability and significance. As a digital lifeline, social media effectively bridged gaps created by physical isolation, serving both practical and emotional needs. Its continued relevance and evolving usage patterns affirm its enduring impact in the contemporary digital age.

To compare the purposes of social media usage before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, a z-test was applied to the collected data. The results clearly indicated a statistically significant difference in the purposes for which social media was used across the two time periods. As previously outlined, the purposes were grouped into four main categories: entertainment, enhancing learning and

knowledge, social interaction, and other purposes. Every statement under these categories showed a notable shift during the COVID-19 period when compared to pre-pandemic usage, highlighting meaningful changes in behavior and intent.

Overall, social media proved to be a highly adaptable and multi-functional tool for students during the pandemic. It effectively catered to a wide range of needs—from entertainment and learning to maintaining social ties and engaging in professional activities. These findings emphasize the critical role that social media played in helping students cope with the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic.

5. Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that the significant shift in social media usage patterns during the pandemic.

6. References

- Calancie O, Ewing L, Narducci LD, Horgan S, Khalid-Khan S. Exploring how social networking sites impact youth with anxiety: A qualitative study of Facebook stressors among adolescents with an anxiety disorder diagnosis. *Cyberpsychology*. 2017 Dec 31;11(4):Article 2. Available from: <https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/8740>
- Gupta K, Dsilva H. Proliferation of Social Media during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Statistical Enquiry. *Xian Jianzhu Keji Daxue Xuebao J Xian Univ Archit Technol*. 2020 Nov 11;XII:1752-9.
- Varun BK. How much time do Indians spend on social media. *The Hindu*. 2019 Aug 21. Available from: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/how-much-time-do-indians-spend-on-social-media/article29201363.ece>
- Valkenburg PM, Peter J. Social consequences of the Internet for adolescents: A decade of research. *Curr Dir Psychol Sci*. 2009;18(1):1-5. Available from: <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2009-02973-001.pdf>
- Wanajak K. Internet use and its impact on secondary school students in Chiang Mai, Thailand [dissertation]. Perth (AU): Edith Cowan University; 2011. Available from: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/394/>
- Bhargava A, Rani M. The influence of social media on Indian teenagers. 2015. Available from: https://www.ijstm.com/images/short_pdf/1430388217_524.pdf
- Utz S, Breuer J. Informational benefits from social media use for professional purposes: Results from a longitudinal study. *Cyberpsychology*. 2016 Dec 1;10(4):Article 3. Available from: <https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/6276>
- Singh MM, Amiri M, Sabbarwal S. Social media usage: Positive and negative effects on the lifestyle of Indian youth. *Soc Sci Res Netw*. 2017. Available from: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3419551>
- Saini N, Sangwan G, Verma M, Kohli A, Kaur M, Lakshmi PVM. Effect of social networking sites on the quality of life of college students: A cross-sectional study from a city in north India. *Sci World J*. 2020;2020:8576023. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2020/8576023>
- Ngien A, Jiang S. The effect of social media on stress among young adults during COVID-19 pandemic: Taking into account fatalism and social media exhaustion. *Health Commun*. 2022;37(10):1337-44. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2021.1888438>
- Ayyıldız F, Şahin G. Effect of social media addiction on eating behavior, body weight and life satisfaction during pandemic period. *Br Food J*. 2022;124(9):2980-92.
- Dhiman B. Use and impact of social media on academic performance of Kurukshetra University students: A case study. 2022 Sep 8. Available from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4212827> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4212827>
- Khan NA, Azhar M, Rahman MN, Akhtar MJ. Scale development and validation for usage of social networking sites during COVID-19. *Technol Soc*. 2022;70(102020):102020.
- Ezumah B. Theory revisited. *Int J Bus Soc Sci*. 2013;4(5):20-9. Available from: https://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_5_May_2013/3.pdf
- El-Berry DK. Awareness and use of academic social networking sites by the academic staff at the South Valley University in Egypt. *J Libr Inf Sci*. 2015;3(2):115-32.
- Altam S. Influence of social media on EFL Yemeni learners in Indian universities during COVID-19 pandemic. *Lingcure*. 2020;4(1):35-47. Available from: <https://lingcure.org/index.php/journal/article/view/19>
- Junco R, Heiberger G, Loken E. The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades: Twitter and student engagement. *J Comput Assist Learn*. 2011;27(2):119-32. Available from: https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/sites/default/files/basic-page-supplementary-materials-files/effect_of_twitter.pdf
- Sunar S, Vishnu Priya V, Gayathri R. Effect of social networking site on academic performance. *Drug Invent Today*. 2018;10(9):1814-61.
- Manjunatha S. The usage of social networking sites among the college students in India. 2013. Available from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/8ef8bfb428a0540aaa632b7b1a017ed66945a3a0>
- Omotayo FO, Salami OM. Use of social media for knowledge sharing among students. *Asian J Inf Sci Technol*. 2018;8(2):65-75. Available from: <https://ajist.co/index.php/ajist/article/view/174>
- Limaye RJ, Sauer M, Ali J, Bernstein J, Wahl B, Barnhill A. Building trust while influencing online COVID-19 content in the social media world. *Lancet Digit Health*. 2020;2(6):e277-8. Available from: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500\(20\)30084-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(20)30084-4)