

"From Scrolling to Sharing: A Study of Social Media Usage Patterns Among the Youth "

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Abstract

Globally, there has been a marked transformation in the dependency upon and usage patterns of social media applications, with youth exhibiting increasing curiosity and engagement in their adoption. SMAs have emerged as significant determinants of individual attitude, perception, cognitive orientation, and lifestyle, functioning simultaneously as sources of entertainment and psychological gratification. Recognizing that multiple factors influence youth inclination toward SMAs, this study investigated these determinants alongside the perception and usage patterns of youth with respect to social media applications. Using a sample of 300 respondents, gender was analyzed as a variable to identify potential behavioral differences. Findings revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female users' engagement levels. The majority of respondents were identified as daily users with more than five years of active usage, typically maintaining one to two accounts across platforms. Instagram emerged as the most preferred application for sustaining connectivity. Predominant activities included audio/video calling, chatting, and photo/video sharing. Friends and the internet were identified as primary sources of awareness, with respondents demonstrating adequate understanding of the legal implications of SMA usage and reporting overall favorable user experiences.

Keywords: social media applications, youth, communication, internet, usage pattern

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the dependency upon, and patterns of engagement with, social media applications (SMAs), a shift driven fundamentally by rapid advances in information technology. Beginning with early platforms such as Yahoo (1994) and blogging sites (1997), and accelerating through the successive launches of Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), WhatsApp (2009), and Instagram (2011), social networking has evolved from a niche activity into a near-universal mode of communication spanning almost every age group and demographic segment, with only very young children remaining largely outside its reach. Recent global data underscore the scale of this transformation. As of 2025–2026, social media usage has reached roughly 5.79 billion identities worldwide, representing close to 70% of the global population, with 94.5% of the eligible population aged 18 and above being active users (Backlinko, 2026). Global users spend an average of approximately 143 minutes, or nearly two hours and twenty-three minutes, on social media each day (Broad band Search, 2026). Notably, youth continue to dominate platform engagement, with females aged 16–24 spending an average of two hours and thirty-five minutes daily on social platforms, the highest of any demographic, while their male counterparts in the same age bracket follow closely behind (The Global Statistics, 2025). Platform preference also varies meaningfully by demographic: while Facebook and YouTube retain the broadest overall reach, Instagram and short-form video platforms have emerged as the dominant choice among younger cohorts, reflecting a generational shift toward visually driven, highly interactive content formats (Broad band Search, 2026).

This sustained and intensifying engagement reflects the multifaceted role SMAs now play in shaping attitudes, perceptions, and lifestyle choices among young users, functioning simultaneously as tools of communication, sources of entertainment, and platforms for self-expression and identity formation. A wide range of factors — including peer influence, connectivity needs, entertainment value, ease of access, and the desire for continuous social validation — continues to drive youth adoption of specific applications, each offering distinct features suited to varying user preferences and communication styles.

Despite the growing body of global usage data, limited research has systematically examined the specific factors influencing platform choice, frequency of use, and behavioral patterns among youth in developing regional contexts, where infrastructural, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions may shape engagement differently than in more extensively studied Western markets. This study seeks to address that gap by investigating the perception, preferences, and usage patterns of youth toward social media applications, with particular attention to the underlying factors that shape their engagement and the platforms they favor.

Review of Literature

The most recent evidence on youth social media usage comes from large-scale, ongoing survey research. **Pew Research Center (2025)** found that YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat remained the most widely used platforms among teens, while Facebook and Twitter/X continued their decade-long decline, and WhatsApp usage rose to nearly a quarter of teens. **Pew Research Center (2023)** similarly confirmed that platform preferences had stabilized around YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, with girls more likely than boys to use TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, and boys more likely to use YouTube. **Dar et al. (2022)** reported that the vast majority of Indian college students now use social media, a trend substantially driven by widespread smartphone access, while **Pew Research Center (2022)** documented that over a third of teens described their platform use as "almost constant," with girls more likely than boys to report spending too much time on social media and finding it harder to give up. **Su et al. (2020)**, in a meta-analysis, examined whether men and women differ in their relative vulnerability to internet gaming versus social media addiction, and **Twenge and Martin (2020)**, analysing large-scale datasets, identified gender differences in the association between digital media use and psychological well-being. **Anjali Singh and Herendra Kumari (2020)** found that adolescents using social media for more than two hours daily displayed measurable differences in depression, anxiety, and stress compared to lighter users, while **Pandey et al. (2020)**, studying agricultural college students in North-Eastern India, documented structured, purpose-driven engagement with social platforms for academic and informational needs. **Kumar and Kumar (2019)** reported that heavy social media use during study hours was associated with reduced academic performance among students. **Alhabash and Ma (2017)**, examining motivations across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat among college students, found platform choice increasingly driven by distinct gratification needs rather than allegiance to a single network, with entertainment and connectivity remaining dominant motivators.

Turning to earlier research, several studies from the first half of the 2010s examined the factors and impacts shaping social media adoption. **Mohammad et al. (2015)** identified social, technological, informational, and educational factors as key drivers of adoption among Malaysian youth. **Kulandairaj (2015)** found that youth increasingly engage with social issues through these platforms, while **Kumar and Deepa (2015)** highlighted technical and privacy-related concerns as significant influences on user behaviour. **Arora (2015)** documented addictive usage patterns with adverse effects on the physical and mental health of Indian youth, particularly linked to conflicts arising from online relationships, and **Shabir et al. (2014)** reported heavy daily usage among youth in Bahawalpur, with frustration commonly arising from unwanted contact requests and misunderstandings. **Krishna (2011)**, **Coutinho (2011)**, and **Parveen (2011)** each emphasized the educational and informational utility of social networking platforms, in library, research, and professional knowledge-sharing contexts respectively. **Metin (2011)** found Facebook to be the dominant platform among Turkish undergraduates, while **Mohamed and Sumitha (2011)** and **Gill and Singh (2011)** documented similarly strong platform loyalty to ORKUT and Facebook respectively among Indian university and research populations. **Mishra and Madhusumita (2011)** compared awareness of the legal implications of

social media use between Indian and American users, and **Kuan and Lu (2011)** found enjoyment to be the strongest predictor of continued use among college students.

Research from the latter part of the 2000s further established the foundations of this field. **Ramesh (2010)**, **Nadire (2010)**, and **Olusegun and Folorunso (2010)** each examined platform preference and adoption attributes among college populations in different regional contexts, while **Roblyer (2010)** found that students primarily used Facebook for chatting, browsing, and academic exchange with instructors. **Fox and Naidu (2009)** and **Calvert (2009)** both assessed comparative platform satisfaction and usage patterns among first-time and college-age users, finding Facebook to be consistently preferred. **Ferdig (2008)**, **Vaughn and Heather (2008)**, and **Karl (2008)** explored professional privacy concerns, motivations for staying connected with close friends and family, and gendered perceptions of social media respectively. **Subrahmanyam and Lin (2007)**, **Goodman (2007)**, and **Madsen (2007)** examined connectivity-seeking behaviour, early-adopter characteristics of youth, and organizational use of social media across genders. Finally, the earliest studies in this review **Gosland (2006)** and **Knouse and Webb (2001)** explored the empowerment potential and gender-based disparities in social networking engagement, laying the groundwork for the gender-focused inquiry that continues to shape research in this area today.

Research Methodology

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the perception of youth towards the usage of social media applications.
2. To analyze the various factors influencing the selection and preference of social media applications among youth.
3. To identify the usage pattern of youth towards various Social media Apps.

This research seeks to examine the various factors that influence youth towards the adoption of social media applications, their underlying purpose for usage, and their preference for specific social media applications (SMAs). To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a descriptive research design, which serves as the outline and framework for the research project by presenting the essential elements of the study being conducted. The study draws upon both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data, which constitutes the raw material subjected to statistical analysis and interpretation, was collected from youth residing in Ludhiana city through a structured questionnaire comprising multiple-choice, closed-ended, and open-ended questions designed to elicit comprehensive information from respondents. Secondary data, on the other hand, was drawn from past records, prior research studies, and relevant literature available in journals, magazines, and books, supplemented by discussions with respondents on various parameters pertinent to the study.

The sampling plan for this research encompasses the population, sample size, and sampling design employed. The population for the study comprised youth within the 18–25 years age group. A sample size of 300 respondents was selected, comprising an equal proportion of male and female participants from the Ludhiana region, in order to facilitate gender-based comparison. The sampling frame consisted of young individuals from various occupational backgrounds within the Ludhiana region who were active users of social media, while the sampling unit was defined at the level of the individual student engaged in the use of social media applications within Ludhiana city. Given the constraints of time, accessibility, and resources, the convenience sampling technique was employed for the purpose of data collection.

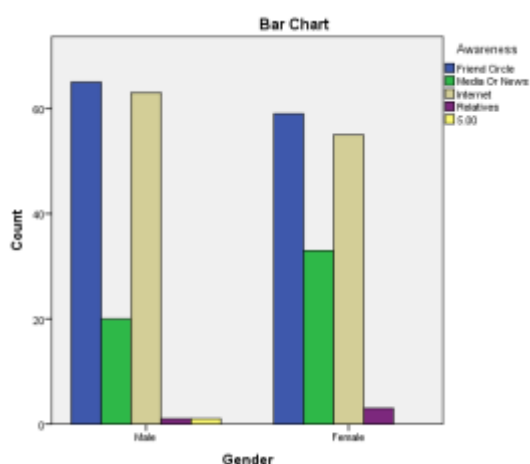
Findings

Significant variation in the results towards the duration since when the social media is used was observed among male and female respondents. Among respondents who have been active on social media for less than one year, 7.7% were male compared to 11.7% female. In the 1–3 years usage category, a considerably higher proportion of female respondents (37.5%) reported usage compared to their male counterparts (16.7%).

Within the 3–5 years bracket, 26.0% of male respondents and 32.7% of female respondents reported usage, while among those active on social media for more than five years, female respondents constituted 48.7% compared to 33.0% of male respondents. **Chi-square value of 26.009 with a corresponding significance value of .000 ($p < .001$)**, indicating that the difference in responses between male and female respondents with respect to the duration of social media usage is statistically significant. Overall, the findings suggest that the majority of respondents, across both genders, have been active social media users for a period exceeding five years, reflecting a well-established and long-term pattern of engagement with these platforms among youth but the usage among females was much more prominent than the male respondents.

Similarly distinct gender-based patterns in the first-priority preference for various social media applications among respondents. Instagram emerged as the most preferred application overall, with 28.6% of female respondents and 22.7% of male respondents ranking it as their first priority. WhatsApp was preferred by 20.7% of male respondents as their first choice, compared to a somewhat lower proportion of female respondents (15.3%). Facebook was ranked as the first priority by 18.6% of female respondents and 15.3% of male respondents, while YouTube was preferred by 20.6% of female respondents and 16% of male respondents as their first choice. Snapchat was ranked first by 8% of male respondents and 7.3% of female respondents, indicating relatively similar levels of preference across genders. Overall, the findings indicate that Instagram is the most preferred social media application among youth of both genders, followed closely by YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook, while niche platforms such as Pinterest and Quora attract only a marginal share of first-priority users.

No significant differences were observed among the respondents in terms of **duration of usage among male and female respondents** as well as the sources of information for the various SMA's. The prominent information source came out to be Friends circle, media, internet and relatives. (Figure1)



There was a marked difference between male and female respondents with respect to the **number of contacts maintained in their social media contact lists**. Among respondents with 0–100 contacts, a considerably higher proportion of female respondents (48%) were observed compared to male respondents (24.7%). In the 100–200 contacts category, the proportions were relatively comparable, with 22% of female respondents and 18% of male respondents falling within this range. Within the 200–300 contacts bracket, male respondents recorded a higher proportion (30.7%) compared to female respondents (21.3%), while among respondents maintaining more than 500 contacts, male respondents again outnumbered female respondents considerably, at 26.7% compared to just 8.7%. Chi-square value of 28.106 with a corresponding significance value of .000 ($p < .001$), indicated a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents with respect to the size of their social media contact lists. Overall, the findings suggest that male respondents tend to maintain relatively smaller social media networks, whereas female respondents are more likely to maintain considerably larger contact lists, reflecting a divergence in networking behaviour between the two genders.

The Legal implications of using and posting on SMA's was analyzed and it was observed that 85% of males and 88% of females were familiar with the legal implications of different SMAs where as 15 % of male and 12% of females are not familiar with legal implications of SMAs.

Factor Analysis

In order to analyse the overall perception of the respondents towards SMA's 24 statements analyzing the various aspects were framed and the data reduction tool (Factor Analysis) was used, the values for KMO and the Bartlett's test was observed as .874. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation (Kaiser Normalization), converging in 22 iterations, extracted **Eight distinct components (factors) which explained 72% of the overall variance** underlying respondents' perceptions of social media applications (SMAs). Each component groups together statements that share a common underlying theme, based on their factor loadings (values above ± 0.50 are considered significant). The factors have been named below according to the conceptual theme reflected by the items loading onto them. The 24 statements have been coded as P1 to P24 and the rotated component matrix along with significant factor loadings has been given below (Table 1).

Rotated Component Matrix ^a									
	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
P1		.648							
P2		.566							
P3				.730					
P4							.728		
P5									
P6	.665								
P7									
P8		.576							
P9				.689					
P10					.724				
P11							.705		
P12									
P13	.517								
P14									
P15	.649								
P16									
P17	.529								
P18									
P19				.635				.736	
P20						.710			
P21									
P22									
P23			.747						
P24			.525						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.									
a. Rotation converged in 22 iterations.									

Factor Naming

Factor 1: Perceived Harms of Excessive Use (Loadings: .665, .649, .529, .517)

This factor comprises items relating to the wastage of time, energy, and effort on SMAs; the tendency of SMAs to cause distraction; and the negative impact of excessive use on social values, relationships, family structure, social pressure, and cyberbullying. This factor reflects respondents' awareness of the **behavioural and social costs associated with overuse** of social media applications.

Factor 2: Perceived Self-Efficacy (Loadings: .648, .576, .566)

Items loading on this factor relate to SMAs being an appropriate platform to spend time fruitfully, a sense of control over one's own time, and user-friendliness that fosters confidence in usage. This factor reflects a **positive, empowerment-oriented perception**, wherein users feel competent and in command of their own social media engagement.

Factor 3: Regulatory Framework and Content Concerns (Loadings: .747, .525)

This factor combines the perceived need for government-formulated rules and regulations regarding uploaded content, alongside concern that information propagated through SMAs often entices negative content leading to social problems. This factor represents respondents' **concern over unregulated content and the resulting call for stronger governance** of social media platforms.

Factor 4: Perceived Indispensability (Loadings: .730, .689, .635)

Items grouped here include SMAs being viewed as the most important source of information and business, life being unimaginable without SMAs, and the belief that judicious use can benefit society as a whole. This factor reflects the **degree of dependency on, and perceived societal utility of, social media**, when used responsibly.

Factor 5: Frustration versus Crisis-Driven Necessity (Loadings: .742, .544)

This factor combines frustration arising from unwanted tags, friend requests, and invalid links, with the (inversely related) perception that SMAs were the most viable means of remaining connected and conducting business. This reflects a **dual, somewhat conflicting perception** irritation with routine platform features, contrasted with reliance during crisis conditions.

Factor 6: Consumer Behavioural Influence (Loadings: .710,)

Items here relate to SMAs facilitating overall education and knowledge enhancement, and information on SMAs influencing buying motives and behaviour. This factor captures the **dual role of SMAs as both an educational resource and a driver of consumer decision-making**.

Factor 7: Academic Performance Enhancement (Loading: .728, .705)

This factor reflects the perception that SMAs serve as an important tool for enhancing performance specifically within the **academic domain**.

Factor 8 : Need for Awareness and Counselling (Loading: .736)

This factor reflects respondents' belief that users need to be **educated and counselled regarding the pros and cons** of using social media applications, indicating a perceived gap in digital literacy and informed usage. This bifurcated factor structure suggests that youth do not perceive SMAs in purely positive or negative terms, but rather hold a **nuanced, dual-natured perception**, recognizing both the developmental/utilitarian benefits and the behavioural/social risks of social media engagement reinforcing the study's broader emphasis on promoting judicious and informed use of social media applications.

Overall Findings: The findings collectively suggest that youth engagement with social media is deep-rooted, gender-differentiated in specific behavioral respects (duration of use, network size), yet largely convergent in platform choice and legal awareness. Most importantly, youth exhibit a balanced, nuanced perception of SMAs recognizing both their constructive potential (education, self-development, connectivity, academic support) and their risks (addiction, distraction, misuse, need for regulation)

reinforcing the study's central argument that **judicious, informed, and responsible use** of social media applications is essential to maximizing their benefits while mitigating associated harms.

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