

# Social Media Engagement Among Higher Education Students: An Analysis of Passive and Active Participation

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## Abstract

Digital media and devices have acquired the central stage in our life. The popularity and affordability of digital devices and internet have boosted the social media usage among various sections of the society. This makes India one of the largest consumers of the social media platforms. Youth population is not an exception to this trend. This study focuses on finding what activities the youth population, specifically the students of colleges and universities, engage with on the social media. The results show that some 40.3% of college and university students never create and share their own content on social media, while only 16.6% do it frequently.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Social Media Activities, Youth, College, University Students.

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## Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of youth population, especially college and university students. The students use these platforms for variety of their needs which are not limited to entertainment (Kumar, N., & Kumar, V. (2023). Students utilize a number of social media platforms for keeping connected with friends and family, education, sharing knowledge, self-expression, and pleasure (Boyd, 2014; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Students make extensive use of social media for information search and academic studies. They access educational films, online lectures, tutorials, webinars, podcasts, research updates and current affairs on platforms including YouTube, Telegram, LinkedIn and X (previously Twitter). Many students communicate with teachers, institutions, peers and alumni to supplement classroom education. Some of them even use these platforms for preparations of competitive examinations and keep updated with the advances in their academic fields (Tess, 2013; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Offering versatile features, the social media is used by college and university students to interact, learn, be entertained, express their creativity, develop their professional qualities and participate in the democratic process. Despite providing social benefits and academic help, these platforms, if used unregulated, can result in distraction, cyberbullying, lower grades, and peddlers of disinformation besides the ill effects on mental health. Therefore, media literacy and responsible digital citizenship have to be promoted so that students may use the benefits of social media and reduce the risks involved (Livingstone, 2008; UNESCO, 2021).

This makes interesting to find out what the college and university students

## Methodology

Exploratory and correlation study research design is adopted for this study which rely upon quantitative research tools and is based on primary data. The population of the study is youth population, specifically the college and university students. The geographical area of the study is the Haryana state of India. Against the sample size of 385 good for practically infinite population, the study included 427 participants selected through convenience sampling, [this sample size is considered good for a confidence level of 95% with a five percent margin of error.

## Literature Review

Kumar, N., & Kumar, V. (2025). Found that however a majority of college students are found to be using social media for less than 4 hours daily, yet a substantial number (14%) use these platforms for more than four hours and interestingly 5.5% students use social media for more than 6 hours daily. Age groups were also found to be a significant determinant of social media usage.

The scope and the nature of such activities vary according to academic fields and requirements, individual interests, and various features offered by different social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Students use social media to keep important interpersonal relationships. Students use platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat to connect with friends, classmates, family and teachers through text messaging, audio and video chats, group discussions and sharing multimedia content. Educational institutions and student communities utilize these platforms for academic material dissemination, management of group work, sharing of lecture notes, and collaborative learning (Ellison et al., 2007; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010. Writing material and being able to express yourself is a major problem. Students share images, films, blogs, reels, stories and creative work, as well as their own ideas, experiences and personal successes. Social media provides an opportunity for identity creation, self-presentation and community participation, providing teenagers with a voice to express their interests and reach audiences beyond their immediate social circles.

Jenkins et al., 2009. Social media is increasingly influencing citizens' participation in various discussions including related to environment, politics and culture. These media also help students part of various public discourses and therefore make them part of mainstream social activities.

Social media participation is still mostly entertainment-based. Students interact with influencers, celebrities and digital communities around music, movies, sports content, memes, live streams and short-form films. At the same time, social media is gaining more and more importance in the professional sphere, e.g. in networking, job search, internship search, entrepreneurship, personal branding and especially LinkedIn (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

## The Results and Discussion

### Frequency of Creating Own Content on Social-Media

**Table 1**

|                                                                    |                 | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| How often do you create and share your own content on social media | Never           | 172       | 40.3%   |
|                                                                    | Very Rarely     | 105       | 24.6%   |
|                                                                    | Occasionally    | 79        | 18.5%   |
|                                                                    | Frequently      | 41        | 9.6%    |
|                                                                    | Very Frequently | 30        | 7.0%    |
|                                                                    | Total           | 427       | 100.0%  |

*Source: Primary data*

The data shows that out of the 427 participants, 172 persons (40.3 percent) said that they had never generated and shared content on social media. Moreover, 105 respondents (24.6 percent) said they “very rarely” create and share content, while 79 (18.5 percent) do it occasionally. Only a small number of the participants displayed high levels of engagement. Forty-one respondents (9.6 percent) reported sharing the content frequently, and 30 persons (7.0 percent) reported sharing very frequently. The average frequency of the five categories is around 85.4, with only the “never” group above this average, suggesting a significant bias toward non-participation. The median is “occasionally” category (79 responses). The mode is shown as “never” which is the commonly used behavior.

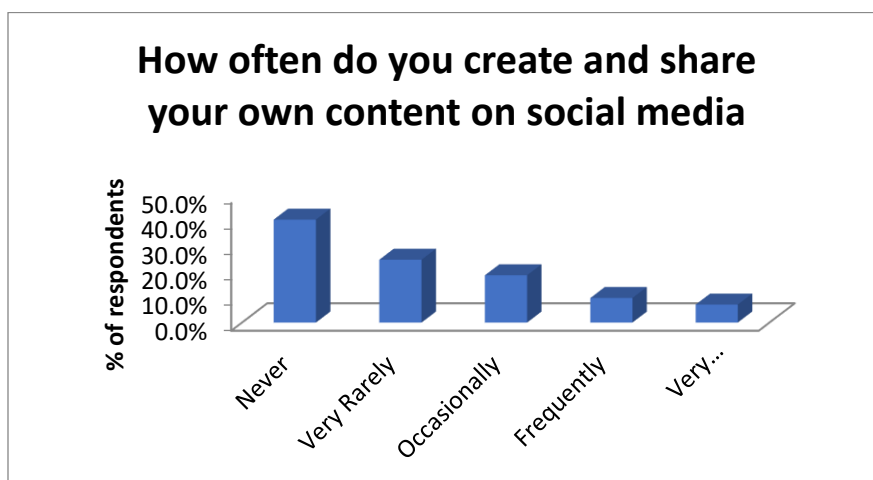


Figure 1:

### Engagement on Particular Activities on Social Media

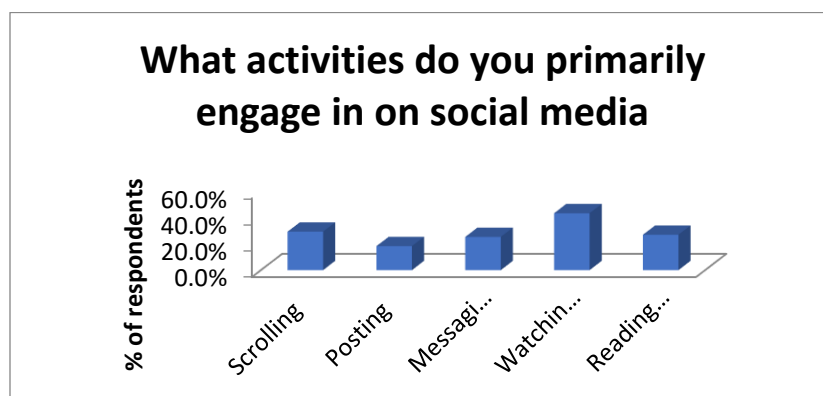
Table 2

| What activities do you primarily engage in on social media |       | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|
| Scrolling                                                  | Yes   | 125       | 29.3%   |
|                                                            | No    | 302       | 70.7%   |
| Posting                                                    | Yes   | 78        | 18.3%   |
|                                                            | No    | 349       | 81.7%   |
| Messaging                                                  | Yes   | 108       | 25.3%   |
|                                                            | No    | 319       | 74.7%   |
| Watching videos                                            | Yes   | 185       | 43.3%   |
|                                                            | No    | 242       | 56.7%   |
| Reading posts                                              | Yes   | 115       | 26.9%   |
|                                                            | No    | 312       | 73.1%   |
|                                                            | Total | 427       | 100.0%  |

Source: Primary data

The survey reveals various patterns of social media engagement with a particular trend towards passive consumption. The most prevalent activity is viewing videos, affirmed by 185 participants (43.3 percent), the mode of the data set. Another prominent trend is casual scrolling as 125 respondents (29.3 percent) answers positively for scrolling. Less popular but interesting trend is messaging by 108 respondents (25.3 percent)

and reading postings by 115 respondents (26.9 percent). The least prevalent activity was posting original content, with just 78 respondents (18.3 percent) doing this, suggesting a limited amount of active participation relative to passive consumption. The mean frequency of the five activities is 85.4. Watching videos (185) and scrolling (125) stand well above average. The median falls between the 3rd and 4th ranked values in order of frequency, which are messaging (108) and reading posts (115). So, the median is 111.5. As evident from the data, the most frequent activity is watching video, which indicates its great popularity compared to other activities.



**Figure 2**

The key highlight is that the social media consumption is defined by passive consumption, e.g. watching videos and scrolling. Participatory behaviors such as reading and posting content fall into a small middle ground. There is not much active posting among the college and university students, meaning that most users seem to prefer consuming material rather than creating it. This data profile suggests a social media culture that is tilted toward passive consumption, where amusement and passive scrolling override active participation.

### **Correlation of social media activities trends with demographic characteristics**

- a) **Demographic factors and creating and sharing on social media:** No statistically significant correlation exists between any demographic factor of student respondents and creating and sharing social media content. 16.6% (regular + extremely frequent) students are active participants. 40.3% of students do not create or share content. The results of the study reveal a strong passive orientation. Women are more passive. Men are more active. Slightly significant. The evidence is inconclusive, but gender may play a role. The most prolific content creators are 21-24, not by much, a developmental phase of optimal self-expression and digital identity formation. Semi-urban students show the least interest. 2.No relation between residence, course, level and stream. Research indicates that only a small percentage of students produce content. 90-9-1, the “participation inequality” rule in social media research, states that most people are consumers and a few contribute, with a small percentage of the population as regular content producers.
- b) **Social media scrolling:** Scrolling is found statistically significant correlated to gender (Chi-Square = 3.862,  $p = .049$ ) and Course level (7.297,  $p = .007$ ). Male students use social media for 36 and female students for 26.5. Social media is more likely to be browsed by men. 32.2% of undergrads

and 17.1% of grads use social media. This implies that undergraduates spend more time scrolling than postgraduates.

- c) **Posting:** Gender (Chi-Square = 9.446,  $p = .002$ ) and Level of Course (4.924,  $p = .026$ ). women are less active in social media than men 20.3% of undergraduates like to post and 9.8% of postgraduates. Postings by gender and course level. Men are far more likely to post. Postgrads post less than undergrads. No correlation for age and residence and field of study but 18-20 years old and science students post more. 18.3% post 29.3% scroll-confirming passive consumption is their main activity. Gender and grade level have an effect on the prevalence of passive scrolling. Active blogging is rare, and varies by gender and course level. Males and undergraduates make more social media posts. more women and postgrads passively scrolling and eating. Most popular is scrolling. The rate of active participation (posting, content creation) varies by gender and course level in general.
- d) **Messaging:** There is no significant correlation found between messaging and any particular demographic attributes. Texting is 2nd after scrolling social media (29.3%) and posting (18.3%) with 25.3% of students texting. Messaging is more interactive than surfing, but remains a minority activity among students. Messaging is an activity that is demographically pervasive, and does not appear to be influenced by gender, age, location, course level or stream. In posting and scrolling, gender and course level were significant predictors, but the message is more generic and evenly distributed across students.
- e) **Watching Videos:** None of the demographic indicators had a significant effect on video-viewing behavior. Most social media videos (43.3%) are most likely to be watched by students, followed by surfing (29.3%), messaging (25.3%) and posting (18.3%). The data echoes a worldwide trend of social media usage being driven by short-form video platforms like YouTube, Instagram Reels and TikTok. Video use is common and gender and academic level do not predict video use. Regardless of gender, age, location or academic classification, video content is the most democratized form of student social media engagement.
- f) **Reading Posts:** Age was marginally significant ( $p = .059$ ), with older students reading more postings. Students primarily read posts (26.9%) (second to videos (43.3%) but comparable to texting (25.3%)). Older people may read more for pleasure, but maybe that's because they prefer facts or introspection to entertainment. Reading postings revealed a more consistent pattern, with mild demographic effects, whereas posting and scrolling predicted gender and course level. Reading posts may appeal to older and more intellectually sophisticated students as a compromise between passive consumption (movies and browsing) and active participation (posting).

## Discussion

Other activities like scrolling and watching videos are also an essential part of social media, with only 16.6% contributing in any form. The distinction between consuming and creating information on interactive platforms is characterized by digital literacy and participatory engagement, which parallels global discussions on the consequences of passive digital media consumption on civic discourse and identity formation (Livingstone, 2019). That is reflected in the demand for cellphones as devices. The devices used to get content least used were laptops and radios with only 9.6% and 4.7% of youngsters utilizing them respectively. The mobile-first

tendency is consistent with global digital convergence trends (Westlund & Ghersetti, 2015), and is driven by the youth's need for mobility and immediacy.

The results highlight the prevalence of rather passive social media use among the college and university students where content consumption is significantly higher than the content creation. Only 16.6% of the respondents stated that they regularly created and shared content on social media platforms while 40.3% never created or shared content on social media at all. The finding is consistent with the well-known 90–9–1 participation inequality, which argues that most social media users are consumers, not creators (Nielsen, 2006; van Mierlo, 2014). Thus far, the gender differences in content creation were not significant, but male students showed higher engagement in posting and scrolling which is consistent with previous findings of higher levels of public self-presentation and online participation among males (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). In fact, undergraduates were significantly more active in scrolling and posting than postgraduates, different approaches towards social media usage based on academic level which might reflect developmental differences in social interaction and identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). On the other hand, no significant correlation with demographic characteristics of the respondents were found for messaging and video viewing, and reading posts. It suggests that these activities have become common trend in social media engagement for student populations. The popularity of video consumption seems to be a common feature with other studies related to the Haryan state. Videos are highly preferred form of content among the college students. Photos come next to videos while text is not so popular (Kumar, N., & Kumar, V. (2025). Video viewing pattern is also in consistent with global trends. There found a rise in the popularity of short-form video platforms amongst young adults (Anderson & Jiang, 2023). Moreover, higher engagement with social media posts among older students may reflect a shift in pattern of media use to a more information-oriented and reflective media use as students grow older (Valkenburg, Meier, & Beyens, 2022). The results show that passive use of social media is prevalent among all demographic groups whereas active use is significantly related to gender and the level of course undertaken by the students.

## Recommendations

The findings suggest that higher education institutions should promote regulated and effective use of social media by students. Awareness programmes on responsible online engagement, digital storytelling and digital content creation can be helpful to stimulate active student participation. Skill development initiatives, mentorship programs, and opportunities for creative digital expression need to be focused upon. More intensive qualitative studies can help reveal more dimensions of the phenomenon particularly to explore individual preferences and personal influence.

## Limitations of the Study

This study may have limitations in generalization of results, Sampling methods and applicability of limited statistical tools can limit the scopes of the study.

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