



Social Media Usage Patterns Among Adults in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Understanding how people use social media in specific regional contexts is crucial because platform adoption, content preferences, and engagement patterns exhibit significant variation across different locales. Such insights enable more precise communication, better-targeted public services, and evidence-based marketing that aligns with local habits and constraints. This cross-sectional study examines the patterns of social media usage among individuals aged 18 years and older who are active social media users in Himachal Pradesh. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 500 users selected via purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation results indicate that YouTube is the most widely used platform, followed by Instagram and Facebook. Smartphones are the dominant access device, while evening hours (6–10 pm) emerge as the peak engagement window, and usage varies systematically across demographics. These results provide region-specific evidence to guide targeted social media marketing and digital inclusion efforts by identifying optimal windows for content timing, platform selection, and audience segmentation.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Networking Sites (SNS), Usage Patterns, Content Scheduling, Demographic Segmentation

INTRODUCTION

Social media comprises networked platforms that merge interpersonal interaction with media technologies, enabling users to create, share, and engage with user-generated content in real time (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein). Built on the architecture of the social web, contemporary services organize participation around persistent profiles, articulated networks, and stream-based communication that shape identity expression, relationship formation, and community life (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). For this study, adults are operationally defined as individuals aged 18 years and above, consistent with standard social research practice. A clear typology helps interpret usage patterns. Following Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) foundational scheme, social media spans: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs/microblogs (e.g., WordPress; X) (Hermida, 2010), content communities (e.g., YouTube, Flickr), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft; Second Life). Contemporary practice extends this to messaging applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram) that blur private and public diffusion, review/rating platforms shaping consumer decisions (e.g., Amazon Reviews, TripAdvisor) (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010), live-streaming services (e.g., Twitch, YouTube Live), and ephemeral media (e.g., Snapchat; Instagram Stories) that privilege short-lived visual sharing. In India's mobile-first environment, where these formats converge, platform portfolios, daily time budgets, peak activity windows, and device ecologies strongly condition how adults encounter information, services, and marketing. Yet region-specific evidence for Himachal Pradesh remains limited, with much scholarship skewed toward student or urban cohorts. Addressing this gap, the present study profiles social media usage patterns among adults (18+) in Himachal Pradesh, focusing on platform choice, intensity and timing of use, and access devices across demographic groups to inform policy communication and audience-targeted strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pfeil et al. (2009) explored age-related differences in the use of MySpace, focusing on how teenagers and older adults built and maintained social capital online. The results showed that teenagers exhibited different social media usage patterns compared to older adults. Teenagers maintained larger, more peer-specific networks primarily within their own age group and actively engaged in using various media such as music and videos on their profiles. They also used more self-references and expressed more negative emotions in their self-descriptions, reflecting a focus on social display and identity formation. In contrast, older adults had smaller, more diverse networks and were less active in media usage and profile self-presentation. These patterns indicated that teenagers used MySpace to build and showcase social capital through extensive networking and media sharing, whereas older users engaged more conservatively with more varied, less media-intensive profiles. **Manjunatha (2013)** examined usage patterns of social networking sites (SNS) among Indian college students, highlighting their widespread engagement and associated social behaviours. Findings revealed that Indian college students actively used social networking sites, with most dedicating between 1 and 10 hours weekly. Male students were more prominent users than females. The primary purpose for using SNS was to maintain existing friendships, with fewer students using it to find new friends or for dating. Additionally, a substantial number of students held accounts on multiple SNS platforms, predominantly on Orkut and Facebook. Overall, the usage pattern indicates that Indian college students are heavily engaged with social media for socialization and relationship maintenance. **Korhan and Ersoy (2016)** explored the factors influencing user preferences for SNS applications through Uses and Gratifications Theory, focusing on usability and functionality aspects. The results showed that WhatsApp was the most favoured application due to its high usability and gratification scores, followed by Instagram, Twitter, and Skype. Younger users prioritized response time, navigation, and satisfaction, while older users valued interaction, memorability, and efficiency. Despite Facebook's widespread use, users expressed less satisfaction with its usability and functionality. The study concluded that usability and functionality significantly impacted app selection and satisfaction, emphasizing the need for developers to tailor features to meet demographic preferences to enhance user experience. **Alhabash and Ma (2017)** conducted a comparative analysis of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, focusing on time spent, use intensity, and motivations among college students, utilizing a Uses & Gratifications framework. The findings revealed that students allocated the most time to Instagram and Snapchat, slightly more than Facebook and significantly more than Twitter. Snapchat and Instagram exhibited the highest use intensity, followed by Facebook and Twitter. Cross-platform motivations clustered around entertainment and convenience as the strongest, with Snapchat typically leading on entertainment, passing time, self-documentation, and social interaction. **Raj et al. (2018)** assessed social networking site (SNS) usage among school students in Siliguri and its impact on academic performance. Results report widespread use of social networking sites among school students in Siliguri, with WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram emerging as the leading platforms. Access is predominantly via smartphones, and engagement is frequent, with many students checking their accounts multiple times a day. A substantial share perceives a negative impact on academic performance, and many were classified as exhibiting addictive patterns of use, particularly among older adolescents. Overall, the findings indicate broad adoption, high engagement, and potential for addiction among students. **Baglari et al. (2020)** examined the pattern of social media use among youth aged 18-25 years and its implications for social media literacy. The findings revealed that social media use typically began around ages 12-18, with females showing higher usage rates. Participants mostly used platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram, spending an average of 120 minutes daily. The study found that social media facilitated communication and information sharing but also led to significant lifestyle disruptions, delays, and privacy concerns. **Bonsaksen et al. (2024)** investigated social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic across different age groups and countries, aiming to understand how usage patterns relate to health-related worries. Using an online survey conducted in Norway, the UK, the USA, and Australia. The findings revealed distinct patterns of social media use across age groups, with older participants engaging more in active use, such as posting and commenting, while younger individuals primarily viewed content passively. Younger users spent more time on social media, used it more frequently for entertainment, and experienced higher levels of stress related to their social media activity. Conversely, older users engaged more for social motives like meeting people and reported feeling more relaxed. These usage patterns suggest that age influences not only how people interact with social media but also their perceptions of its effects, including stress and health worries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEED AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The substantial expansion of India's internet user base, now predominantly rural, has integrated social media into daily life and local commerce. This transformation highlights the necessity of understanding social media usage patterns within specific regional contexts, such as Himachal Pradesh. Despite widespread adoption, there is a paucity of systematic evidence regarding social media usage in Himachal Pradesh, including platform preferences, daily time spent, peak activity hours, primary access devices, and demographic variations. To address this deficiency, the present study utilizes survey data to delineate the usage profiles of active social media users in Himachal Pradesh, providing actionable insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. The sample is confined to residents aged 18 years and above with at least one active social media account, and the field survey was conducted in 2024.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the social media usage patterns among adult social media users in Himachal Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the study's objectives, primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 500 respondents. All respondents were aged 18 years or older and were active users of at least one social media platform. Purposive sampling was used to ensure broad representation across key demographics, including gender, age, educational qualification, and occupation. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), together with cross-tabulations, were used to compare social media usage patterns across demographic groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 4.1 offers a detailed overview of the demographic variables considered in the study. Among the 500 respondents, 50.8 percent are male, while 49.2 percent are female, suggesting an almost equal distribution of male and female social media users in the sample. Regarding age distribution, 25.6 percent of participants fall within the 18-25 age bracket, 41.6 percent are aged 26-35, 18.2 percent are between 36-45, and 14.6 percent are 46 years or older, highlighting a notable presence of younger individuals. In terms of educational qualifications, postgraduates comprise the largest group (43.2%), followed by graduates (25.4%), undergraduates (17.2%), MPhil/PhD holders (9.6%), and holders of professional degrees (4.6%). When examining occupation, employees represent the largest segment (36.8%), followed by students (25.4%), business persons (13.8%), individuals engaged in agriculture (13.6%), and homemakers constitute the smallest portion (10.4%), indicating a varied occupational mix within the sample group.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	254	50.8
	Female	246	49.2
Age Group	18-25 Years	128	25.6
	26-35 Years	208	41.6
	36-45 Years	91	18.2
	46 Years & Above	73	14.6
Educational Qualification	Under Graduate	86	17.2
	Graduate	127	25.4
	Post Graduate	216	43.2
	MPhil / PhD	48	9.6
	Professional Courses	23	4.6
Occupation	Student	127	25.4
	Agriculture	68	13.6
	Employee	184	36.8
	Business	69	13.8
	Homemaker	52	10.4

Source: Primary Data

Social Media Usage Patterns

Social media usage patterns consist of several elements, such as how often people use these platforms, which ones they prefer, their level of interaction, and the times they are most active. Demographic factors significantly influence these patterns. Different social media platforms attract specific demographic groups due to their distinct features and functionalities. Understanding the link between demographic factors and social media usage offers considerable benefits to marketers, businesses, and policymakers. This knowledge enables marketers to create tailored campaigns that increase engagement and improve conversion rates by providing relevant content to the intended audience.

Table 2: Social Media Accounts Across Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables		Social Media Accounts		Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	X (Twitter)	LinkedIn	Pinterest	Snapchat	Total					
		Accounts	Percentage													
Gender	Male	194	76.4%	173	68.1%	220	86.6%	75	29.5%	44	17.3%	26	10.2%	63	24.8%	254
	Female	167	67.9%	195	79.3%	211	85.8%	28	11.4%	58	23.6%	62	25.2%	96	39.0%	246
Age Group	18-25 Years	64	50.0%	114	89.1%	108	84.4%	29	22.7%	38	29.7%	39	30.5%	79	61.7%	128
	26-35 Years	140	67.3%	174	83.7%	191	91.8%	53	25.5%	60	28.8%	43	20.7%	67	32.2%	208
	36-45 Years	86	94.5%	72	79.1%	76	83.5%	21	23.1%	4	4.4%	6	6.6%	13	14.3%	91
	46 Years & above	71	97.3%	8	11.0%	56	76.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	73
Educational Qualification	Under Graduate	61	70.9%	46	53.5%	69	80.2%	10	11.6%	5	5.8%	12	14.0%	26	30.2%	86
	Graduate	98	77.2%	97	76.4%	106	83.5%	28	22.0%	23	18.1%	21	16.5%	28	22.0%	127
	Post Graduate	153	70.8%	178	82.4%	191	88.4%	52	24.1%	63	29.2%	41	19.0%	89	41.2%	216
	MPhil / PhD	35	72.9%	31	64.6%	45	93.8%	9	18.8%	8	16.7%	14	29.2%	12	25.0%	48
	Professional Courses	14	60.9%	16	69.6%	20	87.0%	4	17.4%	3	13.0%	0	0.0%	4	17.4%	23
Occupation	Student	64	50.4%	108	85.0%	110	86.6%	39	30.7%	34	26.8%	33	26.0%	73	57.5%	127
	Agriculture	60	88.2%	36	52.9%	64	94.1%	16	23.5%	4	5.9%	4	5.9%	8	11.8%	68
	Employee	139	75.5%	133	72.3%	168	91.3%	23	12.5%	45	24.5%	37	20.1%	64	34.8%	184
	Business	54	78.3%	51	73.9%	57	82.6%	21	30.4%	15	21.7%	6	8.7%	6	8.7%	69
	Homemaker	44	84.6%	40	76.9%	32	61.5%	4	7.7%	4	7.7%	8	15.4%	8	15.4%	52

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 demonstrates the results of social media accounts by demographic variables. It reveals that YouTube emerged as the most prevalent platform within the sample, followed by Instagram, which is especially strong among younger adults, and Facebook, which

gains increased prominence among older respondents. In contrast, X, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Snapchat cater to comparatively smaller, niche segments. Gender differences reveal that females are more inclined to maintain accounts on Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, whereas males demonstrate a higher likelihood of using X. Both Facebook and YouTube are commonly used across genders. Age-related trends indicate that Facebook ownership escalates with age, peaking among individuals aged 46 years and above. Instagram and Snapchat usage is highest among those aged 18–25 and 26–35, respectively, and declines thereafter, while YouTube maintains consistently high usage across all age groups. In terms of educational attainment, LinkedIn ownership increases with higher qualifications and is most prevalent among postgraduates, whereas Instagram and YouTube maintain high usage across educational categories. Pinterest and Snapchat are relatively more prominent among the more educated. Occupational analysis reveals that students exhibit very high ownership of Instagram and Snapchat, alongside a strong presence on YouTube. Employees demonstrate strong YouTube usage coupled with above-average LinkedIn engagement. Agricultural respondents predominantly rely on Facebook and YouTube, with lower presence on Pinterest and Snapchat. Homemakers display high usage of Facebook and Instagram, with comparatively lower engagement on YouTube. Business respondents present a mixed profile, with moderately higher use of X compared to other occupational groups.

Table 3: Daily Time Spent on Social Media Platforms Across Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables		Time Spent					Total
		Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	More than 4 hours	
Gender	Male	32 12.6%	78 30.7%	73 28.7%	36 14.2%	35 13.8%	254
	Female	21 8.5%	54 22.0%	88 35.8%	57 23.2%	26 10.6%	246
Age Group	18-25 Years	7 5.5%	26 20.3%	42 32.8%	28 21.9%	25 19.5%	128
	26-35 Years	18 8.7%	51 24.5%	71 34.1%	37 17.8%	31 14.9%	208
	36-45 Years	15 16.5%	22 24.2%	29 31.9%	20 22.0%	5 5.5%	91
	46 Years & above	13 17.8%	33 45.2%	19 26.0%	8 11.0%	0 0.0%	73
Educational Qualification	Under Graduate	8 9.3%	23 26.7%	31 36.0%	9 10.5%	15 17.4%	86
	Graduate	12 9.4%	29 22.8%	42 33.1%	27 21.3%	17 13.4%	127
	Post Graduate	22 10.2%	62 28.7%	59 27.3%	48 22.2%	25 11.6%	216
	MPhil / PhD	10 20.8%	10 20.8%	23 47.9%	5 10.4%	0 0.0%	48
	Professional Courses	1 4.3%	8 34.8%	6 26.1%	4 17.4%	4 17.4%	23
Occupation	Student	10 7.9%	29 22.8%	41 32.3%	28 22.0%	19 15.0%	127
	Agriculture	4 5.9%	20 29.4%	20 29.4%	16 23.5%	8 11.8%	68
	Employee	33 17.9%	49 26.6%	51 27.7%	23 12.5%	28 15.2%	184
	Business	6 8.7%	18 26.1%	33 47.8%	6 8.7%	6 8.7%	69
	Homemaker	0 0.0%	16 30.8%	16 30.8%	20 38.5%	0 0.0%	52

Source: Primary Data

According to Table 3, across various demographic groups, the average daily engagement with social media ranges from 2 to 3 hours, with significant clusters also observed in the 1 to 2 hour and 3 to 4 hour intervals. Analysing usage by gender, it is observed that men predominantly report usage of 1 to 2 hours (30.7%) and 2 to 3 hours (28.7%), whereas women tend to engage in longer sessions, particularly 2 to 3 hours (35.8%) and 3 to 4 hours (23.2%). Notably, a greater proportion of men than women report usage exceeding 4 hours (13.8% compared to 10.6%). Age-related patterns reveal that the youngest cohorts spend the most time online. Individuals aged 18 to 25 years constitute the largest segment, exceeding 4 hours (19.5%), followed by those aged 26 to 35 years (14.9%). Usage declines markedly in older age groups, with only 5.5 percent of those aged 36 to 45 years and none of those aged 46 years and above exceeding 4 hours, with the latter group predominantly engaging for 1 to 2 hours (45.2%). Educational attainment appears to influence usage patterns, with individuals holding lower qualifications exhibiting heavier use. Both undergraduates and professional course holders have 17.4 percent in the more than 4 hours category, while respondents with MPhil/PhD qualifications predominantly report 2 to 3 hours (47.9%) and no usage exceeding 4 hours. Occupational analysis indicates that students maintain prolonged usage (2 to 3 hours: 32.3%; 3 to 4 hours: 22.0%; more than 4 hours: 15.0%), homemakers are inclined towards 3 to 4 hours (38.5%) with no usage exceeding 4 hours, and business people are concentrated at 2 to 3 hours (47.8%). Employees exhibit a more evenly distributed pattern, with the highest proportion of less than 1 hour usage among occupations (17.9%) but still a notable more than 4 hours segment (15.2%). Overall, the findings suggest that younger users and students engage in longer daily sessions, whereas older and more highly educated groups tend towards shorter, more limited usage.

Table 4: Peak Activity Times on Social Media Platforms Across Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables		Time					Total
		Before 10 am	10 am - 2 pm	2 pm - 6 pm	6 pm - 10 pm	After 10 pm	
Gender	Male	46 18.1%	9 3.5%	20 7.9%	117 46.1%	62 24.4%	254
	Female	15 6.1%	16 6.5%	22 8.9%	145 58.9%	48 19.5%	246
Age Group	18-25 Years	3 2.3%	10 7.8%	9 7.0%	79 61.7%	27 21.1%	128
	26-35 Years	8 3.8%	11 5.3%	13 6.3%	118 56.7%	58 27.9%	208
	36-45 Years	32 35.2%	1 1.1%	8 8.8%	29 31.9%	21 23.1%	91
	46 Years & above	18 24.7%	3 4.1%	12 16.4%	36 49.3%	4 5.5%	73
Educational Qualification	Under Graduate	25 29.1%	6 7.0%	9 10.5%	33 38.4%	13 15.1%	86
	Graduate	12 9.4%	9 7.1%	13 10.2%	65 51.2%	28 22.0%	127
	Post Graduate	18 8.3%	10 4.6%	20 9.3%	116 53.7%	52 24.1%	216
	MPhil / PhD	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	37 77.1%	11 22.9%	48
	Professional Courses	6 26.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	11 47.8%	6 26.1%	23
Occupation	Student	2 1.6%	9 7.1%	10 7.9%	76 59.8%	30 23.6%	127
	Agriculture	24 35.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	28 41.2%	16 23.5%	68
	Employee	13 7.1%	10 5.4%	8 4.3%	112 60.9%	41 22.3%	184

	Business	18 26.1%	6 8.7%	12 17.4%	18 26.1%	15 21.7%	69
	Homemaker	4 7.7%	0 0.0%	12 23.1%	28 53.8%	8 15.4%	52

Source: Primary Data

As illustrated in Table 4, the majority of individuals (52.4%) engage with social media during the evening hours (6–10 pm). The subsequent most prevalent time is post-10 pm (22%), followed by pre-10 am (12.2%), 2–6 pm (8.4%), and 10 am–2 pm (5%). Analysing by gender, women predominantly utilize social media in the evening (58.9%), whereas men exhibit a lower evening usage (46.1%) and a slightly higher engagement in the morning (18.1%) and late-night (24.4%). Age-wise, individuals aged 18–25 and 26–35 primarily use social media in the evening (61.7% and 56.7%, respectively); notably, the 26–35 age group also demonstrates the highest late-night usage (27.9%). The 36–45 age group is more active before 10 am (35.2%), while those aged 46 and above return to an evening peak (49.3%) with minimal late-night activity (5.5%). In terms of educational attainment, respondents with MPhil/PhD qualifications are predominantly active in the evening (77.1%); postgraduates also prefer evening usage (53.7%) with some late-night activity (24.1%). Undergraduates exhibit the highest morning usage (29.1%). Occupationally, employees (60.9%) and students (59.8%) show peak activity in the evening; homemakers display a modest afternoon (2–6 pm) increase (23.1%) alongside a significant evening share (53.8%). Individuals in agriculture are divided between morning (35.3%) and evening (41.2%) usage, while those in business distribute their social media activity throughout the day.

Table 5: Social Media Usage Experience

Time	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	10	2.0
1-2 years	13	2.6
2-3 years	33	6.6
3-4 years	89	17.8
More than 4 years	355	71.0
Total	500	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 indicates that a substantial majority of respondents have engaged with social media for a long period of time. Specifically, 71 percent report usage exceeding four years, while 17.8 percent indicate an experience of 3–4 years. A smaller proportion, 6.6 percent, have used social media for 2–3 years, 2.6 percent for 1–2 years, and only 2 percent have less than one year of experience.

Table 6: Devices Used to Access Social Media Platforms

Devices	Frequency	Percentage of Respondents
Personal Computer	18	3.6
Laptop	100	20.0
Tablet	21	4.2
Smart Phone	497	99.4

Source: Primary Data

Table 6 demonstrates a predominant reliance on mobile for accessing social media. A substantial portion (99.4%) of the respondents reported utilizing a smartphone. In contrast, 20 percent indicated the use of a laptop, 4.2% percent a tablet, and 3.6 percent a personal computer.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the majority of respondents possess over four years of experience, with nearly all accessing platforms via smartphones. Activity peaks in the evening (6–10 pm), with a significant late-night continuation. YouTube is the preferred platform, followed by Instagram and Facebook, while X, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Snapchat cater to smaller, more segmented audiences. Usage intensity is concentrated around 2–3 hours per day, with longer durations observed among younger users and students, and shorter durations among older and more highly educated groups. Distinct demographic patterns are evident: women predominantly use

Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat; men are relatively more active on X; Facebook usage increases with age; LinkedIn is primarily used by postgraduates and employees; Instagram and Snapchat are popular among students; and Facebook-YouTube combinations are prevalent among individuals in agriculture and homemakers. These findings suggest that outreach should be optimized for smartphones, scheduled primarily for evening hours, and tailored to specific segments. Overall, an effective strategy in this context relies on timing (evenings), format (mobile video), and precise demographic targeting.

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