
IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON NEWS CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AMONG INDIAN YOUTH IN THE AI ERA: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND TRUST DEFICIT

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and social media platforms has transformed news consumption patterns across the world. India, with over 806 million internet users and approximately 491 million social media users in 2025, represents one of the largest digital news markets globally. This study examines how social media platforms influence news consumption among Indian youth and investigates the associated challenges of misinformation, trust, and media literacy. The research adopts a descriptive analytical approach using secondary data from Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, DataReportal 2025, industry reports, and academic literature. Findings indicate that social media has become the primary gateway to news for young audiences, while traditional newspapers and television continue to experience declining engagement. However, the increased dependence on algorithm-driven content has created concerns regarding misinformation, echo chambers, and declining trust in journalism. The study concludes that media literacy education and ethical AI regulation are essential for sustaining informed democratic participation.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, News Consumption, Indian Youth, Digital Journalism, Artificial Intelligence, Media Trust, Fake News.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed a revolutionary transformation in communication systems. The convergence of mobile technology, internet connectivity, artificial intelligence, and social networking platforms has significantly altered the way audiences consume news. Traditional newspapers, radio, and television are increasingly being replaced by mobile-first digital platforms. India has emerged as one of the world's largest digital markets. According to the Digital 2025 India Report, the country had approximately 806 million internet users and 491 million social media users by January 2025. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) have become dominant channels for information dissemination. Young audiences, particularly those aged 18–35 years, rely heavily on social media for accessing current affairs, entertainment news, political updates, and public opinion. The rise of AI-powered recommendation systems has further personalized news consumption. However, this personalization has raised concerns regarding misinformation, selective exposure, political polarization, and declining trust in journalism. This study seeks to explore the impact of social media on news consumption patterns among Indian youth and identify emerging challenges in the digital media ecosystem.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the growth of social media as a source of news among Indian youth.
2. To analyze changing news consumption patterns in the digital era.
3. To identify challenges related to misinformation and trust in media.

Research Methodology

The study is based on a descriptive and analytical research design. Secondary data analysis was used to identify trends and patterns in digital news consumption. Sources of data collected from; Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, DataReportal Digital India Report 2025, Industry reports, Scholarly articles, Government publications, Media research studies

Review of Literature

Numerous studies indicate that social media has become a significant source of news consumption among young people. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, audiences increasingly discover news through social media feeds rather than directly visiting news websites. Trust in traditional journalism continues to decline globally while

alternative media ecosystems gain influence. Newman (2025) argues that declining trust and low engagement have become major concerns for news organizations worldwide. Social media algorithms often prioritize engagement over accuracy, leading to increased visibility of sensational content. Research by Lumikai's "Swipe Before Type 2025" report highlights a shift from passive content consumption to active participation, with users increasingly creating, sharing, and interacting with digital content. The relationship between social media and news consumption has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past decade. Researchers have examined the implications of digital platforms for journalism, audience behavior, political communication, information credibility, and democratic participation.

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2025), social media platforms continue to play a central role in news discovery, particularly among younger audiences. The report notes that audiences increasingly access news through platform-based ecosystems rather than directly visiting news websites. This shift has altered the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists and media organizations.

Castells (2010), in his theory of the Network Society, argues that communication technologies have fundamentally transformed social structures by creating interconnected information networks. He emphasizes that power in contemporary societies is increasingly exercised through communication networks, making social media a significant force in shaping public opinion and information flows.

Jenkins (2006) introduced the concept of convergence culture, explaining how audiences have evolved from passive consumers to active participants in media production and distribution. Social media platforms enable users to comment, share, remix, and create news content, thereby transforming traditional audience roles.

Hermida (2012) examined the concept of ambient journalism, suggesting that social media platforms provide a continuous stream of information that enables users to remain informed about current events without actively seeking news. According to Hermida, platforms such as Twitter (X) create awareness through constant updates and interactions.

Shirky (2011) argued that social media has empowered citizens by reducing barriers to communication and facilitating collective action. His research demonstrated how digital platforms have been used during political movements, protests, and social campaigns to mobilize public participation and disseminate information rapidly.

Pariser (2011) introduced the concept of the filter bubble, highlighting the dangers of algorithmic personalization. According to Pariser, recommendation systems expose users

primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and contributing to ideological polarization.

Sunstein (2017) further expanded this discussion by examining how online communication environments can create echo chambers, where users repeatedly encounter similar viewpoints. Such environments may intensify political divisions and reduce constructive public discourse.

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) conducted influential research on fake news during election campaigns. Their study found that misinformation spreads rapidly through social networks because emotionally engaging content often receives more attention and sharing than verified information. They concluded that digital literacy and fact-checking initiatives are essential for combating misinformation.

Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) analyzed the spread of false news on social media and discovered that false information spreads significantly faster and reaches more people than truthful information. Their findings suggest that novelty and emotional appeal contribute to the viral nature of misinformation.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) developed a framework distinguishing misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. Their work has become foundational in understanding information disorders within digital communication ecosystems. They argue that combating false information requires cooperation among governments, media organizations, educational institutions, and technology companies.

Newman et al. (2024) observed that trust in news has declined in many countries due to concerns about political bias, sensationalism, and information overload. Their findings indicate that younger audiences increasingly rely on influencers, independent creators, and alternative news sources rather than traditional journalism organizations.

Pew Research Center (2024) reported that social media has become the primary source of news for a substantial proportion of young adults worldwide. The study revealed that video-based platforms such as YouTube, Instagram Reels, and TikTok are becoming dominant channels for news consumption among Generation Z audiences.

In the Indian context, Kumar and Singh (2023) found that university students increasingly rely on social media platforms for political information and public affairs updates. Their study revealed that while students appreciate the convenience and accessibility of social media news, they often struggle to distinguish credible information from misleading content. Similarly, Rao and Sharma (2024) observed that WhatsApp remains one of the most

influential information-sharing platforms in India. However, the platform's encrypted and private nature makes monitoring misinformation particularly challenging.

The literature collectively indicates that social media has democratized access to information and expanded opportunities for public participation. At the same time, concerns regarding misinformation, declining trust, algorithmic bias, echo chambers, and political polarization remain significant challenges. These studies provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for examining news consumption patterns among Indian youth in the era of artificial intelligence and digital journalism.

Growth of Digital Media in India

India's digital transformation has accelerated significantly due to affordable smartphones and low-cost internet access. The widespread availability of low-cost internet has enabled millions of young users to access information anytime and anywhere. Key Digital Statistics of India (2025):

Indicator	Number
Internet Users	806 Million
Social Media Users	491 Million
Mobile Connections	1.12 Billion
YouTube Users	491 Million
Instagram Users	414 Million
LinkedIn Users	150 Million
Snapchat Users	208 Million

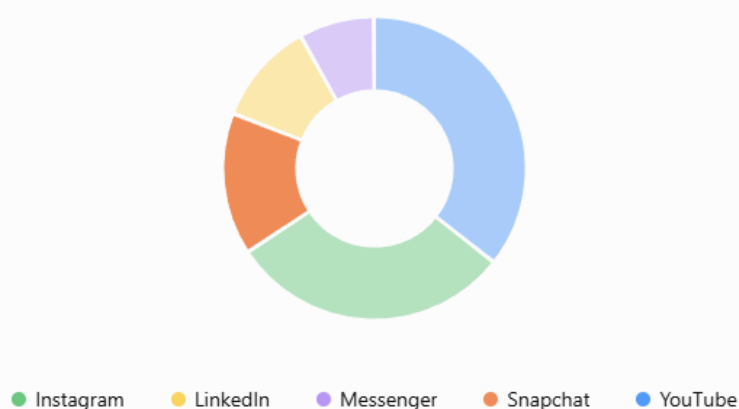
Source: DataReportal 2025

Social Media News Consumption Distribution in India (2025)

The following chart illustrates the approximate share of major social media platforms used for information and content consumption based on user reach data. The chart clearly indicates the dominance of YouTube and Instagram among Indian digital audiences.

Major Social Media Platforms in India (2025)

Platform user reach based on DataReportal India 2025 statistics.



Source: DataReportal 2025

Impact of Social Media on News Consumption

Instant Access to Information: Social media platforms provide real-time access to breaking news and current affairs. Users receive updates instantly through notifications, feeds, and live streams. **Benefits:** Faster information dissemination, Wider audience reach, Citizen Participation in journalism, Greater accessibility

Rise of Citizen Journalism: The emergence of smartphones has transformed ordinary citizens into content creators. During emergencies, elections, and disasters, eyewitnesses often share information before mainstream media organizations. Citizen journalism has increased diversity in news reporting and expanded democratic participation.

Personalization through Artificial Intelligence: AI-powered recommendation systems analyze user preferences and browsing behavior to provide personalized content. **Advantages include:** Relevant news suggestions, Improved user engagement, Enhanced user experience. However, excessive personalization may create "filter bubbles" where users encounter only information that aligns with their existing beliefs.

Increased Political Engagement: Social media platforms have become important spaces for political discourse and public debate. Political parties increasingly use: YouTube channels, Instagram campaigns, WhatsApp groups, Influencer collaboration to reach young voters and shape public opinion.

Challenges Associated with Social Media News Consumption

Spread of Fake News: One of the most significant concerns is misinformation. False information spreads rapidly due to: Algorithmic amplification, Emotional content, Lack of verification, User sharing behavior. Studies indicate growing concern among audiences regarding fake news and manipulated information online.

Declining Trust in Journalism: The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025 highlights a global decline in trust toward traditional journalism. Audiences increasingly rely on creators, influencers, and alternative information sources. Reasons include: Political polarization, Perceived media bias, Information overload, Sensational reporting

Echo Chambers and Polarization: AI algorithms often prioritize content similar to users' existing interests. Consequences include: Limited exposure to opposing viewpoints, Political polarization, Confirmation bias, Reduced public deliberation.

News Avoidance: Research indicates that many users deliberately avoid news because they perceive it as: Negative, Repetitive, Stressful and politically divisive. This phenomenon threatens informed citizenship and democratic participation.

AI and the Future of Journalism: Artificial Intelligence is reshaping journalism in multiple ways. Applications include: Automated Content Creation, AI tools generate; News summaries, Headlines, Sports reports, Financial updates. Data Journalism; AI helps journalists analyze large datasets more efficiently. Fact checking; Machine learning systems can identify misinformation patterns and assist in verification processes. Audience Analytics; News organizations use AI to understand audience behavior and improve content strategies. However, concerns remain regarding: Algorithmic bias, Transparency, Editorial accountability, Deepfakes. Media professionals must ensure that AI supports rather than replaces ethical journalism.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that social media has become the primary source of information for many young Indians. The affordability of smartphones and internet services has accelerated digital news adoption. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram dominate audience attention. AI-driven personalization enhances user engagement but simultaneously contributes to misinformation and ideological fragmentation. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025 highlights a broader global trend of declining trust in traditional journalism. Simultaneously, creator-driven content ecosystems continue to gain

influence. India's digital media landscape reflects these global developments. While social media democratizes communication and encourages participation, it also creates challenges for credibility, verification, and public trust.

Suggestions

Strengthen Media Literacy Education: Media literacy should be integrated into school and university curricula to help students evaluate information critically. **Promote Fact-Checking Mechanisms:** News organizations should establish dedicated fact-checking teams and collaborate with independent verification agencies. **Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence:** Media organizations must adopt transparent AI policies and maintain editorial oversight. **Encourage Responsible Platform Governance:** Social media companies should improve transparency regarding recommendation algorithms and misinformation control. **Support Quality Journalism:** Governments, academic institutions, and civil society organizations should promote public-interest journalism.

CONCLUSION

Social media has fundamentally transformed news consumption patterns among Indian youth. The growth of internet connectivity, smartphone adoption, and AI-driven platforms has created unprecedented access to information. While these developments have democratized communication and increased audience participation, they have also introduced significant challenges related to misinformation, trust, and polarization. The future of journalism will depend on the ability of media institutions, technology companies, policymakers, and educational institutions to balance innovation with ethical responsibility. Strengthening media literacy and promoting credible journalism will be essential for sustaining informed democratic societies in the digital age.

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