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Current Prospective, Relevance, Application, Benefits and Challenges of Social Media Towards Higher Education in Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in higher education in India, reshaping teaching-learning processes, academic communication, and institutional engagement. In the current perspective, platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn are increasingly integrated into academic ecosystems, enabling collaborative learning, digital content sharing, and real-time interaction between teachers and students. The relevance of social media lies in its ability to democratize access to knowledge, support blended and online learning environments, and foster digital literacy among learners in alignment with contemporary educational policies. The application of social media in Indian higher education includes virtual classrooms, academic discussions, dissemination of research, peer learning, and professional networking. It facilitates innovative pedagogical approaches such as flipped classrooms, MOOCs, and informal learning communities, thereby extending learning beyond traditional classrooms. The benefits are manifold, including enhanced student engagement, accessibility of diverse learning resources, cost-effectiveness, and opportunities for skill development and global exposure. In this article; current prospective, relevance, application, benefits and challenges of social media towards higher education in Indian context has been discussed.

Keywords: *Social, Media, Higher, Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in higher education, reshaping the ways in which knowledge is created, shared, and consumed in contemporary India. With the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure, affordable internet access, and widespread use of platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter), social media has become deeply embedded in the academic lives of students, teachers, and institutions. In the Indian context—characterized by diversity, demographic advantage, and ongoing educational reforms—social media plays a significant role in bridging gaps between formal and informal learning environments. From a current perspective, social media is no longer merely a tool for communication but an interactive pedagogical medium that supports collaborative learning, knowledge exchange, and academic networking. It enhances the relevance of higher education by making learning more accessible, flexible, and aligned with the needs of a digitally connected generation. Universities and colleges



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increasingly use social media for academic dissemination, student engagement, research collaboration, and institutional branding, especially in the wake of initiatives like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes technology integration. The application of social media in higher education includes online discussions, virtual classrooms, peer learning communities, dissemination of e-resources, and real-time feedback mechanisms. These practices contribute to several benefits such as increased student participation, improved digital literacy, global exposure, and democratization of knowledge. At the same time, the growing reliance on social media presents notable challenges, including issues of digital divide, information authenticity, privacy concerns, cyberbullying, and the potential for distraction and reduced academic focus. Thus, in the Indian higher education landscape, social media stands as both an opportunity and a challenge. Its effective integration requires a balanced, critical, and policy-driven approach to harness its potential while addressing its limitations, ensuring that it contributes meaningfully to the goals of inclusive, equitable, and quality education (Berkant, H. G., 2019).

APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Application of social media in higher education has significantly transformed and expanded scope accessibility and quality of learning in 21st century. What began as tools for casual interaction have evolved into powerful instruments for academic communication content dissemination collaboration and institutional growth. integration of platforms such as Facebook WhatsApp YouTube Twitter LinkedIn and specialized learning tools like SWAYAM and NPTEL has accelerated innovation boosted enrollment and increased student engagement leading to a noticeable boom in Indian and global higher education sectors.

One of key reasons behind this growth is enhanced communication and engagement that social media enables among students' teachers and administrators. These platforms allow real-time interaction feedback and discussion both inside and outside classroom. WhatsApp groups for academic discussions Facebook pages for course updates and Telegram channels for resource sharing have become integral to modern university ecosystem. This continuous accessible communication has improved student satisfaction and retention rates. When social media is integrated meaningfully into course design it leads to increased student participation and academic motivation.

Moreover, collaborative capabilities of social media have democratized knowledge sharing allowing students from diverse backgrounds to interact with each other and with global academic communities. Platforms like Google Docs Slack and Microsoft Teams enable collaborative writing project management and peer feedback thereby developing teamwork and critical thinking skills. This aligns with constructivist learning models that emphasize student autonomy and active participation. Resulting boost in student engagement has led many institutions to reimagine curricula around blended and flipped learning models further increasing enrollment and institutional competitiveness.



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Another major factor in educational boom is expansion of digital and open learning environments through media enabled Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Platforms such as SWAYAM and NPTEL in India which incorporate social and interactive features have attracted millions of learners from rural and urban backgrounds alike offering courses from top institutions for free or at low cost. These platforms use video lectures discussion forums, quizzes and certificates to emulate real classroom experiences. It also notes that these enhanced online learning tools have played a pivotal role in addressing issues of accessibility, especially for students in remote and underserved areas.

Furthermore, social media has enhanced visibility and reputation of higher education institutions contributing to their national and international ranking. Institutions actively promote research achievements, events, student success stories and community outreach programs through Facebook Instagram Twitter and LinkedIn. This kind of media engagement helps universities attract funding international collaborations and student applications. Strategic media communication has become vital in global branding and competitive positioning of universities.

In addition, social media supports professional development and employability by helping students build digital identities and networks. LinkedIn for example allows students to showcase their academic achievements skills and projects to potential employers. ResearchGate and Academia.edu enable students and faculty to share their research work build citation networks and stay updated on trends in their discipline. As Manca and Ranieri (2016) observe these platforms not only enhance academic visibility but also prepare students for digital workplace.

Importantly during COVID19 pandemic application of social media and digital platforms ensured educational continuity. With closure of physical campuses platforms like Zoom Google Meet and YouTube Live became default classrooms. Institutions that had already integrated media tools were able to make a seamless transition demonstrating resilience and adaptability of media supported education systems. This experience further accelerated adoption of hybrid learning models, making digital media a permanent feature of higher education (Okoye, K., Van Belle, J. P., & Kguwe, L., 2016).

However, while social media has fueled growth of higher education it is not without challenges. Issues such as digital distractions misinformation and concerns about academic integrity must be addressed. Equitable access to devices teacher training and digital literacy programs, are essential to ensure that medical boom benefits all students not just privileged.

Application of social media has significantly contributed to expansion innovation and modernization of higher education. From facilitating collaborative learning and expanding access through MOOCs to boosting institutional visibility and student employability social media has been central to educational boom in digital era. While challenges persist with strategic planning and inclusive practices media technologies will continue to redefine future of higher education.



RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Integration of social media into higher education has dramatically reshaped educational landscape worldwide. According to a 2023 report by Pew Research Center over 95% of college students globally use at least one social media platform and around 70% actively use these tools for academic purposes. This prevalence underscores transition of social media from a space for casual communication to one of pedagogical significance. In India All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020–21 data does not directly report social media usage but emphasizes digital expansion in universities which increasingly includes platform-based learning. Additionally, platforms like SWAYAM and NPTEL incorporate social media components for student interaction and content sharing further integrating digital tools into formal educational structures.

Social media has introduced a new pedagogical paradigm in higher education one that is interactive learner centered and digitally connected. Traditional modes of instruction are increasingly supplemented with tools such as WhatsApp for classroom announcements Facebook groups for academic discussion LinkedIn for career building and YouTube for concept explanation. This new model shifts learning beyond classroom boundaries enabling continuous engagement peer collaboration and access to diverse resources. It also noted social media supports both formal and informal learning blurring boundaries between them and fostering knowledge cocreation among students and faculty. Moreover, increased use of collaborative platforms such as Google Docs and Microsoft Teams has redefined assignments and assessments encouraging more process oriented and participatory academic practices.

Roles played by higher education institutions in leveraging social media are multifaceted. Firstly, universities and colleges use social media for institutional branding communication and outreach. Chronicle of Higher Education over 85% of higher education institutions maintain active social media profiles using them to share academic achievements research breakthroughs and campus events. This visibility aids in student recruitment, alumni engagement and public image building. Secondly institutions deploy social media as part of their learning management systems (LMS) and massive open online courses (MOOCs). Platforms like SWAYAM Coursera and edX integrate discussion forums peer review systems and real-time communication tools often modeled on or linked to social platforms. These systems enhance student interaction motivation and retention particularly in largescale or remote education settings.

Additionally, institutions use social media to enhance professional development for faculty. Many universities organize digital literacy training encouraging teachers to incorporate Facebook Live sessions Twitter discussions or Instagram stories into their pedagogical repertoire. This not only promotes active learning but also helps faculty establish academic presence in broader scholarly communities. The integration improves relational dynamics between teachers and students creating more democratic and personalized learning environments. Importantly during COVID19 pandemic institutions that had already integrated social media into their infrastructure were better able to ensure academic continuity. Platforms like Zoom YouTube Live and Telegram became default classrooms demonstrating flexibility and resilience offered by social media learning ecosystems.



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However increasing relevance of social media in higher education also comes with challenges. While benefits include greater engagement wider access and enriched communication issues such as digital distraction data privacy misinformation and unequal access to technology remain pressing. Institutions must therefore adopt responsible digital policies and provide training on critical media literacy. It has emphasized need for a balanced approach that safeguards academic integrity and personal boundaries while exploiting collaborative potential of social media (Saini, M., & Uddin, R., 2020).

In conclusion social media has become an indispensable tool in higher education not only because of its widespread use but because it fundamentally transforms how learning is experienced delivered and managed. Many institutions and students use social media for academic purposes worldwide it is evident that digital platforms are no longer optional but central to evolution of modern education. Their relevance lies not only in technological affordances but in their ability to connect engage and empower academic communities in unprecedented ways (Forkosh-Baruch, A., & Hershkovitz, A., 2012).

CURRENT PROSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDIA

Rise of internet accessibility and digital connectivity in India has witnessed an extraordinary surge especially in both rural and urban sectors over past decade. According to Digital and Social Media Landscape in India 2019 report India had approximately 560 million active internet users a figure expected to cross 600 million by 2021 making it second largest internet market in world after China. This growth has been primarily driven by widespread use of mobile phones with over 1.2 billion mobile phone subscriptions reported across country. affordability of smartphones and drastic reduction in mobile data costs after introduction of Reliance Jio's services have catalyzed this digital revolution.

Government of India has also played a pivotal role through its flagship initiative Digital India which aims to extend highspeed broadband access to rural areas via panchayats (village councils) thereby fostering inclusive digital connectivity. Initiatives such as BharatNet and village level WiFi hotspots have brought millions of previously disconnected individuals into digital fold. This is further supported by private telecom providers offering competitive and low-cost data plans enhancing both reach and affordability of internet across socioeconomic strata. According to a Statista report published in 2020 326.1 million Indians were social media users in 2018 with projections estimating this number would grow to 447.9 million by 2023.

Significant regional variations in internet penetration persist across Indian states. National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi records highest penetration followed by Kerala Jammu & Kashmir Haryana Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. In contrast tier 3 and rural areas continue to lag due to infrastructural challenges. Urban centers like Mumbai and Delhi host largest internet using populations whereas smaller towns and rural communities report relatively lower usage levels. Interestingly states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are witnessing increasing participation of women in digital spaces suggesting a progressive shift in digital gender inclusion.



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Globally use of social media is witnessing parallel growth. A Statista report from July 2017 highlighted that global number of social media users in 2017 was 2.46 billion projected to increase to 3.02 billion by 2021. India alone had around 448 million social network users by 2021 a remarkable jump from 351 million in 2019. Indian users reportedly spent over 17 hours per week on social media platforms underscoring its central role in daily life. Among most popular platforms Facebook and YouTube top list in India followed by WhatsApp which has become an essential communication tool even in rural regions. Global Digital Report 2019 reveals that Facebook alone had over 2.4 billion active users YouTube with 1.9 billion and WhatsApp with 1.5 billion confirming their dominance on global social media landscape.

A striking trend is rise of video content and entertainment exemplified by platforms like TikTok which achieved over 1.5 billion downloads worldwide a large share of which originated from India before its ban. success of such platforms signifies a growing appetite for visual and shortform content among Indian users. Correspondingly digital video advertising has emerged as fastest growing segment of digital media outpacing traditional formats in terms of investment and user engagement.

On a broader scale Global Digital Report 2019 outlined that number of internet users worldwide in 2019 reached 4.388 billion growing by 9.1% year on year. Similarly social media users globally grew to 3.484 billion a 9% increase and smartphone users rose to 5.112 billion a 2% increase. These statistics highlight worldwide shift toward mobile first internet access and embedded role of social media in personal professional and educational contexts.

India's digital ecosystem is evolving rapidly due to a confluence of factors innovation governmental policy and market competition. Explosion in internet and social media usage has had profound effects on sectors including education commerce governance and social relations. As rural penetration deepens and digital literacy improves India's trajectory toward becoming a digitally empowered society appears more promising than ever (Zhang, Y., & Leung, L., 2015).

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Integration of social media into higher education has unlocked transformative benefits that extend far beyond communication and content sharing. One of most significant advantages is enhancement of collaborative learning environments. Social media platforms such as Google Docs, Facebook groups and Microsoft Teams allow students to engage in synchronous and asynchronous discussions peer evaluations and collective knowledge construction. This aligns the theory of social constructivism which emphasizes learning as a social process. These platforms foster student engagement critical thinking and cocreation of content which are foundational to deeper academic understanding.

Another key benefit of social media in higher education lies in its ability to facilitate personalized and flexible learning. Through tools such as YouTube podcasts LinkedIn Learning and academic blogs students can access a wide array of learning materials at their convenience enabling them to learn at their own pace and revisit content as needed. This flexibility is especially beneficial for diverse learners and supports lifelong learning goals. It argues that social media bridges gap between



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formal and informal learning providing students with continuous access to educational resources beyond classroom setting. It enables students to explore academic content tailored to improve their interest's retention and motivation.

In context of research and academic projects social media plays a pivotal role in expanding access to research communities and increasing research visibility. Platforms like ResearchGate Academia.edu Twitter (now X) and LinkedIn are commonly used by researchers to share preprints find collaborators and disseminate findings to both academic and nonacademic audiences. It observed that social media fosters “networked participatory scholarship” where researchers actively engage in discussions open access publishing and interdisciplinary collaboration. These interactions often lead to innovative research partnerships joint projects and grant opportunities across institutions and countries.

Social media has also become a powerful tool in crowdsourcing ideas data and participant recruitment for academic projects. For instance, researchers increasingly use Twitter polls Reddit forums and Facebook groups to gather opinions conduct surveys or connect with niche populations for field research. Such platforms are valuable for engaging with real-time diverse and dynamic audiences which is crucial in fields like education sociology and public health. This crowdsourced approach democratizes research and accelerates data collection particularly in studies that require broad or rapid participation.

In domain of academic writing and publishing social media helps students and faculty enhance their scholarly communication skills. Blogging vlogging and microblogging are being incorporated into coursework to foster academic reflection and outreach. As students write for digital audiences, they learn to synthesize complex ideas in accessible language improving both their academic and public writing abilities. This aligns with growing movement toward open education and public scholarship where knowledge production is not confined to peer reviewed journals but shared widely through social channels.

Institutions themselves benefit from social media by using it to support institutional branding alumni networking and student recruitment. Universities showcase student research projects faculty publications and academic conferences on social media to build credibility and attract prospective students. During COVID19 pandemic social media became a lifeline for sustaining academic activities used not only for class management and announcements but also for virtual research symposia poster sessions and collaborative webinars. This digital shift has normalized use of social platforms in formal academic settings and emphasized their importance in knowledge dissemination (Raj, R., 2016).

New directions are also emerging as social media converges with advanced digital technologies in higher education. For example, use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in social media enhanced platforms is gaining traction in academic projects. These tools enable students to participate in historical simulations or collaborative design studios offering immersive and



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experiential learning virtual labs. Additionally social media integrated portfolios are being used to showcase students' research work multimedia projects and academic journeys aiding both assessment and employability.

Furthermore, social media analytics are becoming crucial in assessing reach and impact of academic content. Educators and researchers use engagement metrics such as likes shares comments and retweets to evaluate which topics resonate with learners and which strategies enhance public engagement. Students who engaged in academic discussions on Twitter showed higher levels of GPA and engagement compared to those who did not. This evidence supports inclusion of social media strategies in curriculum planning student engagement models and institutional communication.

Social media in higher education fosters an ecosystem that supports collaboration, innovation, accessibility and academic identity formation. Its role in transforming student learning faculty development research collaboration and scholarly communication is substantial. With ongoing technological evolution next phase of social media use in academia will likely emphasize enhanced interactions immersive experiences and greater focus on digital scholarship redefining way knowledge is created shared and applied in higher education.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Use of social media in higher education while replete with opportunities also presents a series of complex challenges that educator's institutions and students must navigate. One of most frequently cited concerns is issue of distraction and reduced academic focus. Social media platforms are designed to encourage constant engagement and for many students this leads to compulsive checking behaviors and divided attention. It also found a negative correlation between time spent on Facebook and academic performance among college students suggesting that nonacademic social media usage can hinder concentration and reduce time allocated to studies. Addictive nature of platforms like Instagram and TikTok can further compromise students' ability to manage their academic responsibilities effectively.

Another major challenge is spread of misinformation and lack of content credibility. Social media operates in real time and often lacks gatekeeping mechanisms of academic publishing. This makes it easy for students to encounter and unknowingly share inaccurate or unverified information. In context of higher education where critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning are paramount reliance on dubious online sources can dilute academic rigor. The proliferation of fake news and low-quality content on digital platforms creates an epistemic environment that challenges development of information literacy among university students. Institutions must therefore place greater emphasis on training students to critically evaluate online content.

Cyberbullying harassment and digital toxicity also pose significant problems in academic communities engaging with social media. Unlike traditional classrooms social media spaces can be less regulated and often anonymous which sometimes leads to spread of hate speech trolling and personal attacks. For students who already face marginalization due to race gender or sexuality these



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online environments can feel hostile. It highlights that cyberbullying within academic settings is not uncommon and its effects include anxiety withdrawal from learning communities and reduced classroom participation. Educators must be equipped with tools and policies to monitor digital interactions establish norms for respectful discourse and provide safe reporting mechanisms (Tess, P. A., 2013).

Digital divide and unequal access to technology represent another persistent challenge. While social media appears ubiquitous not all students have equal access to smartphones stable internet connections or digital literacy skills. This inequality exacerbates existing educational disparities particularly among students from rural areas or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. According to AISHE 2020–21 report by Ministry of Education in India significant gaps remain in digital infrastructure between urban and rural higher education institutions. Social media integration in pedagogy without equitable access risks marginalizing students who are already underrepresented in higher education.

Privacy and data security concerns are increasingly prominent in discussions about social media use in educational settings. Students may be required to share personal information or create public profiles on platforms that track and monetize user data. This compromises their autonomy and exposes them to surveillance and commercial exploitation. It argues that use of corporate owned platforms in academia raises ethical questions about data ownership consent and commodification of student interactions. Institutions must balance pedagogical benefits of social media with robust data protection policies and informed consent practices.

Another critical challenge is blurring of personal and academic boundaries. Many students and educators struggle to maintain a professional identity on platforms originally intended for informal or social interactions. Constant connectivity encouraged by social media also places pressure on students to be perpetually available contributing to burnout and reduced wellbeing. Educators too may feel compelled to be online beyond working hours responding to messages or engaging in academic discourse without clear boundaries. This erosion of work life separation is a growing concern in digital learning ecosystem.

From an institutional standpoint lack of policy guidance and digital pedagogy training for faculty is a serious limitation. While many universities have embraced social media tools fewer have comprehensive guidelines that address ethical legal and pedagogical concerns. Faculty members may adopt social media based on individual interest leading to inconsistencies in use and at times inappropriate practices. It emphasized that for social media to be used effectively in higher education instructors need structured training on digital tools online etiquette and student privacy management (Greenhow, C., & Lewin, C., 2016).

Looking toward future several new directions are emerging to address these challenges. One promising avenue is development of institution specific education focused social platforms. These platforms designed with academic integrity and privacy in mind offer benefits of social media



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without distractions or ethical issues of commercial alternatives. Platforms like Edmodo and Moodle already incorporate social elements in a controlled environment. Moreover, increasing interest in decentralized open-source alternatives such as Mastodon for scholarly networking reflects a push for greater autonomy and data control in educational communities.

Use of AI enhanced moderation and content filtering tools is also gaining traction. Such technologies can help monitor digital interactions flag inappropriate content and promote respectful discourse in online academic communities. Institutions are also investing in digital wellbeing programs that teach students how to manage screen time practice mindful engagement and set healthy online boundaries. These programs represent a proactive shift in addressing psychological and behavioral impact of social media on academic life.

Social media holds transformative potential for higher education its challenges are multifaceted and require deliberate policy driven and ethically grounded responses. Institutions must invest in digital infrastructure promote media literacy enforce privacy norms and support both faculty and students in navigating these platforms responsibly. Only then can academically use of social media evolve into an equitable empowering and sustainable practice in digital age.

CONCLUSION

In the contemporary Indian higher education landscape, social media has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping teaching-learning processes, academic communication, and institutional outreach. Its growing relevance lies in its ability to facilitate collaborative learning, enhance digital engagement, and democratize access to knowledge beyond traditional classroom boundaries. Platforms such as discussion forums, video-sharing sites, and academic networks enable students and educators to exchange ideas, access diverse resources, and remain connected in an increasingly globalized academic environment. The application of social media in higher education in India is evident in blended learning models, online seminars, peer learning communities, and institutional branding. It supports innovative pedagogies, including flipped classrooms and interactive learning, thereby aligning with the broader goals of digital education initiatives in the country. Moreover, it promotes inclusivity by reaching learners in remote and marginalized regions, thus contributing to educational equity. However, despite its numerous benefits—such as flexibility, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and enhanced engagement—social media also presents significant challenges. Issues related to digital divide, misinformation, lack of digital literacy, privacy concerns, and potential distractions can hinder its effective utilization. Furthermore, the absence of proper regulatory frameworks and pedagogical guidelines may limit its academic credibility. Therefore, while social media holds immense potential to enrich higher education in India, its successful integration requires a balanced and strategic approach. Policymakers, educators, and institutions must work collaboratively to maximize its benefits while addressing its challenges through digital literacy programs, ethical guidelines, and robust infrastructure. In doing so, social media can become a powerful tool for advancing quality, inclusivity, and innovation in Indian higher education.



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