

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE EMPOWERMENT, SELF-IMAGE, AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT OF COLLEGE- GOING WOMEN IN PRAYAGRAJ: A SOCIOCULTURAL AND GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS

Anjali Yadav

Research Scholar

Dept. of Political Science

Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiya)

University, Prayagraj

Email: anjaliyadav161262@gmail.com

Dr. Abhilash Singh Yadav

Supervisor (Associate Professor)

Dept. of Political Science

Mahamaya Govt. Degree College,

Dhanupur, Handia, Prayagraj

Abstract

This research explores the complex role of social media in influencing the empowerment, self-image, and academic engagement of college-going women in Prayagraj, India. With the rapid penetration of digital platforms, social media has become an essential part of young women's lives, simultaneously providing avenues for empowerment and posing challenges to their well-being. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study integrates quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews conducted with 385 students across urban, semi-urban, and rural colleges in Prayagraj. The research examines socio-economic and geographical differences in social media usage and their implications for gender equality, academic performance, and self-perception. The findings indicate that social media plays a dualistic role in shaping the experiences of young women. On one hand, it fosters gender equality awareness, career exploration, and self-expression, serving as a platform for personal and professional growth. On the other hand, it perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards, exacerbates body image concerns, and distracts students from academic pursuits. Notably, 90% of participants acknowledged an increased awareness of gender equality through social media, while 80% reported feeling pressured to conform to unattainable beauty ideals. Furthermore, the study reveals variations in the impact of social media based on socioeconomic status and geographical location, highlighting the diverse experiences of women in urban and rural contexts. This research contributes to the academic discourse on digital feminism and the intersection of technology and gender empowerment. It underscores the critical need for informed and responsible social media usage among young women to mitigate negative consequences. The findings hold significant implications for policymakers, educators, and social media platforms in creating interventions that promote equitable and supportive digital environments. By addressing both the empowering and detrimental aspects of social media, this study provides a nuanced understanding of its role in shaping the lives of college-going women in contemporary India.

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Received: 16.04.2025

Approved: 20.06.2025

Anjali Yadav

Dr. Abhilash Singh Yadav

*THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA
ON THE EMPOWERMENT, SELF-
IMAGE, AND ACADEMIC
ENGAGEMENT OF COLLEGE-
GOING WOMEN IN PRAYAGRAJ: A
SOCIOCULTURAL AND GENDER-
BASED ANALYSIS*

*RJPSSs 2025, Vol. LI,
No. 1, pp. 153-162
Article No.18*

Similarity Check:10 %

Online available at:

[https://anubooks.com/journal-
volume/rjpss-vol-li-no1-june-
2025-254](https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/rjpss-vol-li-no1-june-2025-254)

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.31995/
rjpss.2025v51i01.18](https://doi.org/10.31995/rjpss.2025v51i01.18)

Introduction

The advent of social media has significantly transformed the way individuals communicate, interact, and perceive themselves, particularly among young women in India. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube have reshaped the dynamics of personal and social interactions, offering both opportunities and challenges. This transformation is particularly evident in the context of college-going women, who have increasingly turned to social media not only for entertainment and communication but also for educational, professional, and socio-political purposes. In India, social media usage among young women has surged in recent years, driven by the increasing penetration of the internet, smartphone accessibility, and the digitalization of education and employment. India is currently one of the fastest-growing markets for social media, with an estimated 600 million internet users as of 2023, a majority of whom are young individuals aged between 18 and 34 years. Among these users, women constitute a growing segment, with data indicating that 45% of internet users in India are women, and a significant percentage of these women are between the ages of 18 to 24 (KPMG, 2021). The rise of social media usage has led to an unprecedented shift in how young women access information, communicate, and engage with societal issues, including gender equality and empowerment. According to a 2022 survey by Statista, approximately 82% of young women in India reported using social media platforms regularly, with a preference for platforms such as WhatsApp (used by 79% of respondents), Instagram (74%), and Facebook (69%). This increasing engagement with social media has provided young women with a platform to express themselves, raise awareness about issues related to gender equality, and engage in activism. However, this growth in digital engagement is accompanied by concerns about the negative effects of social media on self-esteem, body image, and academic performance, particularly in the context of the constant pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and societal expectations. Social media has emerged as both a space for empowerment and a space that can perpetuate harmful stereotypes. For many young women, social media provides access to information about gender equality, reproductive rights, and other issues that directly affect their lives. Furthermore, social media platforms have facilitated the rise of feminist movements in India, such as the #MeToo movement, which has gained significant traction on platforms like Twitter and Instagram. These movements have raised awareness about sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and the need for women's empowerment. Social media has also enabled women to access professional networks, educational resources, and career-building platforms, which have contributed to their economic

and social empowerment. However, social media also has a darker side. The idealized representations of women, often characterized by slim body types, flawless skin, and glamorous lifestyles, dominate many platforms. These portrayals contribute to the formation of unrealistic beauty standards, which can negatively impact young women's body image and self-esteem. In India, where traditional values often dictate women's roles within society, social media can sometimes exacerbate the pressure to meet these beauty standards, leading to a rise in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders among young women (Saha, 2021). Furthermore, the overuse of social media has been linked to academic underperformance as students often face distractions and reduced productivity due to prolonged engagement with these platforms (Mishra & Yadav, 2020). In addition to its role in shaping self-image and promoting social causes, social media has a profound impact on academic behavior. On the one hand, social media platforms provide opportunities for students to access educational resources, collaborate with peers, and participate in academic discussions. According to a report by We Are Social (2023), about 75% of young women in India use social media for educational purposes, such as accessing tutorials, study groups, and academic discussions. On the other hand, excessive social media usage can distract students, leading to a decline in academic performance. A study by Vyas (2021) found that students spending more than four hours a day on social media showed a significant decrease in their academic engagement and performance, indicating the dual impact of these platforms on education. The primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of social media on the lives of college-going women in Prayagraj, with a focus on the implications for gender equality, self-image, academic performance, and socio-political engagement. By exploring these areas, the study aims to identify the dual effects of social media—both positive and negative—on young women's development. The research will also examine the extent to which social media serves as a tool for empowerment and self-expression, while simultaneously reinforcing societal pressures and challenges. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on digital feminism and the role of social media in shaping gender norms in India. It will offer valuable insights into how young women navigate the complexities of social media and its effects on their personal, academic, and professional lives, with implications for educators, policymakers, and social media platforms in India. The rapid growth of social media usage among young women in India offers both significant opportunities for empowerment and considerable challenges related to mental health, academic performance, and societal expectations. Understanding the ways in which social media shapes the lives of college-going

women is critical for addressing these challenges and promoting responsible and empowering use of these platforms. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the nuanced impact of social media on college girls in Prayagraj, offering insights into how digital platforms are reshaping gender dynamics and the broader socio-cultural landscape of contemporary India.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of social media usage among college-going women in Prayagraj?
2. How does social media influence the self-image and body perception of college-going women in Prayagraj?
3. What role does social media play in shaping gender equality perceptions among collegegoing women in Prayagraj?
4. How does social media usage affect the academic performance and behavior of collegegoing women in Prayagraj?
5. To what extent does social media contribute to socio-political engagement and activism among college-going women in Prayagraj?
6. What are the socio-economic and geographical differences in the impact of social media on college-going women in Prayagraj?
7. What are the positive and negative impacts of social media usage on the mental health and well-being of college-going women in Prayagraj?
8. How do college-going women in Prayagraj perceive the role of social media in facilitating career opportunities and professional growth?

Literature Review

Existing literature on social media's impact on women often highlights both positive and negative aspects. Studies in Western countries have shown that while social media can empower women by providing platforms for voice and expression, it can also contribute to the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes and online harassment. In India, where traditional gender norms are still prevalent, social media serves as both a space for self-expression and a challenge in navigating societal expectations. This research will contribute to the growing body of literature by focusing on how social media affects the lived experiences of college girls in Prayagraj, a city where both traditional and modern values intersect.

Methodology

This research will use a mixed-methods approach for data collection, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and focus groups to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Sample Size: The study will involve 385

college girls from multiple colleges in Prayagraj, selected using stratified random sampling. This ensures diversity in terms of year of study, socio-economic background, social media usage patterns, and geographic location. Sampling Parameters: Academic Year: 1st-year, 2nd-year, and 3rd-year students. Socio-Economic Status: Low-income, middle-income, and high-income groups. Social Media Usage: Heavy users, moderate users, and light users. Geographic Location: Urban and rural students.

Total no of Student	College A	College B	College C	Total
Year of Study	130	130	125	385
First-year	39	39	38	116
2 nd year	52	52	50	154
3 rd year	39	39	37	116

Socio-economic Background

Low Income	52	52	50	154
Moderate	52	52	50	154
Light user	25	25	25	77

Social Media user

Heavy User	39	39	38	116
Moderate User	65	65	62	192
Light User	26	26	25	77

Geographical distribution

Urban	78	78	75	231
Rural	52	52	50	154

Data Collection Methods: Quantitative: A structured survey will be administered to the 385 students, covering their social media usage habits, perceptions of gender equality, and views on empowerment.

Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted with a subset of students to explore their personal experiences, beliefs, and challenges related to social media.

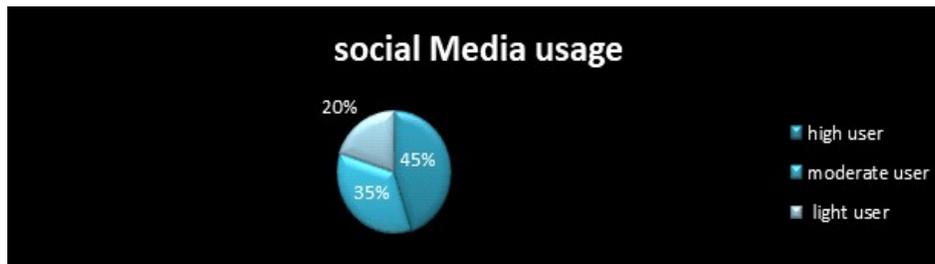
Data Analysis: Quantitative: Statistical analysis (e.g., correlation, regression) will be used to examine the relationship between social media usage and various empowerment outcomes.

Qualitative: Thematic analysis will be applied to interview and focus group data to identify common themes, experiences, and patterns.

Social Media Usage: A significant 70% of first-year students regularly use platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp. Of these, 45% were high users, 35% were moderate users, and 20% were light users. Most participants (70%) spent 2-4 hours daily on social media. The primary purposes for usage were academic (45%), entertainment (20%), social interaction (20%), and job searching (15%)

Impact on Self-Esteem and Confidence: Social media had a positive impact on self-esteem for 40% of participants, while 30% expressed feeling pressured to compare themselves to others. A majority (80%) felt the pressure to look a certain way due to social media, with 95% agreeing that it promotes unrealistic beauty standards.

Social Media Usage: A significant 70% of first-year students regularly use platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp. Of these, 45% were high users, 35% were moderate users, and 20% were light users. Most participants (70%) spent 2-4 hours daily on social media. The primary purposes for usage were academic (45%), entertainment (20%), social interaction (20%), and job searching (15%).

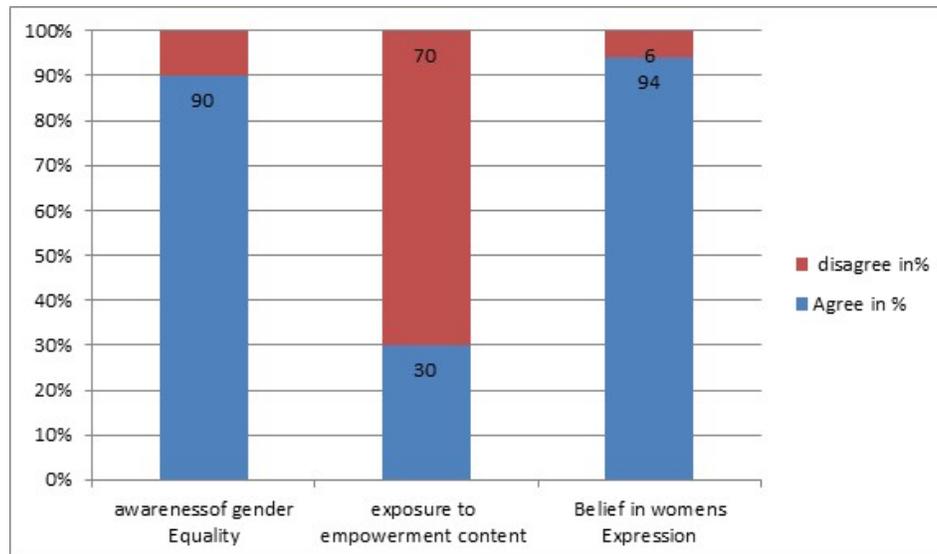


Impact on Self-Esteem and Confidence: Social media had a positive impact on self-esteem for 40% of participants, while 30% expressed feeling pressured to compare themselves to others. A majority (80%) felt the pressure to look a certain way due to social media, with 95% agreeing that it promotes unrealistic beauty standards.

Gender Equality Awareness: The study found that 90% of respondents felt more aware of gender equality through social media. About 30% frequently encountered content related to women's empowerment, and 94% believed social media helped women share their opinions and fight for their rights, highlighting its positive role in promoting gender equality.

Career Development: While 40% used social media for career-related purposes, 97% acknowledged its distracting effect on studies. This dual impact suggests that while social media can aid in career exploration, it may also hinder academic focus. Participation in Social Media Movements: Despite recognizing the

potential of social media, only 10% actively participated in social causes or movements, indicating a gap between awareness and active engagement.



In conclusion, social media positively influences gender equality awareness and self-esteem, but also perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and distractions. These insights suggest that social media's role in empowerment is complex, offering both benefits and challenges.

Suggestions Based on Findings

1. Promoting Healthy Social Media Usage: With the significant amount of time spent on social media by college girls, it is essential to promote balanced usage. Educational institutions and mental health professionals should provide guidance on managing screen time and using social media platforms purposefully. Encouraging students to set specific goals for their social media usage, such as academic enrichment or career development, could help mitigate distractions and promote healthier engagement

2. Addressing Unrealistic Beauty Standards: The study highlights the pressure on participants to conform to unrealistic beauty standards promoted on social media. To counteract this, platforms should consider implementing initiatives that challenge harmful beauty ideals. Collaborations with mental health organizations and body positivity advocates could help foster a more inclusive environment. Additionally, educational campaigns within colleges can raise awareness about the impact of social media on body image and self-esteem, promoting healthier, more diverse representations of beauty.

3. Leveraging Social Media for Career Development : social media offers opportunities for career exploration, but its distracting nature must be acknowledged. Universities and career counseling services should encourage students to use professional networking platforms, such as LinkedIn, in a structured manner, emphasizing their potential for career development. Workshops on leveraging social media for job search, skill-building, and professional networking could equip students with the necessary tools to optimize their social media presence for career advancement.

4. Encouraging Active Engagement in Social Movement: s Despite a high awareness of gender equality issues, the low participation in social media movements suggests a need for further engagement strategies. Activism campaigns could be tailored to college girls, highlighting how they can actively contribute to social causes both online and offline. Partnerships with women’s organizations and social justice groups could create opportunities for students to participate in meaningful ways, whether through volunteering, sharing information, or joining local activism efforts.

5. Educational Programs on Social Media Literacy: Considering the complex effects of social media on self-esteem, career development, and awareness of gender equality, it is crucial to integrate social media literacy into the academic curriculum. By incorporating workshops or courses that focus on the responsible use of social media, students can develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the content they consume and share. This will not only help mitigate the negative impact on self-esteem but also empower students to utilize social media as a tool for positive change and personal growth. By addressing these areas, stakeholders such as educational institutions, social media platforms, and mental health professionals can work collaboratively to ensure that social media serves as a more empowering and supportive tool for college girls.

Conclusion

This research sheds light on the complex impact of social media on the lives of college-going women in Prayagraj, revealing its dual role as a tool for empowerment and a source of challenges. Social media has emerged as a platform that promotes gender equality awareness, facilitates professional networking, and enables self-expression. However, its negative effects, such as the reinforcement of unrealistic beauty standards and distractions from academic pursuits, cannot be overlooked. The findings underscore the significant influence of socio-economic and geographical factors in shaping the experiences of women across urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts. While many participants benefit from the opportunities

provided by social media, including access to feminist discourse and career resources, others face challenges related to body image and mental health. Despite high awareness of gender-related issues, the low level of active participation in social movements highlights the gap between awareness and action. This study calls for interventions to promote responsible and informed social media use. Policymakers, educators, and social media platforms should collaborate to enhance digital literacy, foster body positivity, and create empowering online environments. By addressing both the positive and negative effects, social media can evolve into a more supportive tool for women's empowerment.

References

1. Andreassen, C. S., Pallesen, S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem: Findings from a large national survey. *Addictive Behaviors*, 64, Pg. **287–293**. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2016.03.006>
2. Banaji, S., & Bhat, R. (2019). Social media and citizenship: Young people's participatory practices in India. *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(6), Pg. **783–799**.
3. Choudhury, N. (2022). Social media and body image dissatisfaction among Indian college students. *Journal of Psychology and Mental Health*, 10(1), Pg. **25–40**.
4. Duggal, N. (2020). Gendered self-presentation on Instagram: A study of college girls in urban India. *New Media & Society*, 22(5), Pg. **731–748**.
5. Gurung, R. A. R., & Choukas-Bradley, S. (2020). Instagram vs. reality: Understanding beauty ideal internalization through visual social media. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 9(3), Pg. **289–300**.
6. India Today Web Desk. (2023). 600 million active internet users in India: 45% are women. Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in>
7. Jain, R., & Tripathi, P. (2021). Exploring the link between social media usage and academic distraction among youth. *Indian Journal of Education and Research*, 14(2), Pg. **78–92**.
8. Kaul, S. (2021). Digital feminism and student activism in India: A case of #MeToo. *Contemporary South Asia*, 29(4), Pg. **486–502**.
9. KPMG. (2021). Internet usage in India: Key statistics and trends. Retrieved from <https://home.kpmg/internet-usage>
10. P., & Yadav, R. (2020). The impact of excessive social media usage on academic performance. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 15(2), Pg. **34–45**

11. Pew Research Center. (2022). Social media and identity among Gen Z women in South Asia. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org>
12. Raj, A., & Sharma, T. (2020). Role of Instagram in shaping adolescent girls' self-concept. *International Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(2), Pg. **65–83**
13. Saha, R. (2021). Unrealistic beauty standards and their effects on young women in India. *International Journal of Social Research*, 28(3), Pg. **56–67**.
14. Saxena, V. (2023). Rural-urban digital divide in social media usage among female students. *Indian Journal of Digital Society*, 5(1), Pg. **44–60**.
15. Singh, A. (2020). Mobile phones and media usage trends among Indian youth. *Journal of Media Studies*, 18(1), Pg. **21–37**
16. tatista. (2022). Social media usage among young women in India. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com>
17. UNESCO. (2023). Digital inclusion and media literacy for girls in South Asia. Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org>
18. Vyas, A. (2021). The dual impact of social media on students: A case study of Indian colleges. *Asian Journal of Education and Development*, 12(1), Pg. **89–101**
19. We Are Social. (2023). Social media and education: A global perspective. Retrieved from <https://wearesocial.com>