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Research Article

Impact of Social Media on the Cultural Perception of Youth

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Abstract:

When it comes to the present moment, the internet has established itself as the platform of choice for consumption of information. With social media being at the forefront and having a substantial impact on the youth, there exists a plethora of information in different fields and varieties. This unending supply of information from numerous channels is molding the understanding of people. This document will discuss the effect of cultural regional information made available through social media and the impact of social media on the youths perception. It also looks into how young people comprehend different cultures, traditions, and international relations. A mixed-method approach which includes the use of surveys and qualitative content analysis is deployed to evaluate the level of cultural participation of the youths. The results showed that even though social media increases the scope of culture appreciation and sociocultural understanding, the problems of false information and shallow understanding also prevail. The research reports the possibility of using social media as an educational resource to promote authentic understanding of cultures.

Key words: Social Media, Content, Influence, Youth, Cultural Understanding

Introduction

As estimated by Statista in their February 2025 reports, there are nearly 5.56 billion people who have access to the internet amongst which, social media is being used by 5.24 billion individuals actively throughout. On the other hand, if we look at the India Today magazine reports which were being released in November 2024, it stated that 398 million of young individuals are constantly using social media within India without deviating their focus to any offline activity and Hindustan Times posted a survey report in February 2024 where in they stated that 30% of rural individuals who don't even know to read, browse the internet. The Internet being easily accessible

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to every individual during recent times, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, X, Threads, YouTube, etc. have not just become a good source of entertainment and an activity to spend their time, but also to gather various types of information across the domains. Due to an increasing demand and to make sure that audiences spend more time using any social media platform, these platforms have made sure to launch various rich and interactive features which provide audience opportunities for diverse and constructive dialogues. (Sarwar 10,11) However, what accompanies this type of information is the power of building perception and influencing the consumer to shape their perspectives. On the opposite end, if we look at India, which is always being a culturally diverse and rich country with various forms of culture, rituals and traditions being followed across various parts of the country, the essence of these events is experienced in different forms in different parts of the country, by every individuals which is leading to different versions of the information being shared in different formats. And social media being one of the easiest way to communicate and share experiences in recent times, these plethora of perceptions and perspectives which are driven by experiences are shared in high amounts on different platforms. When the adoption of social media platforms has surged among individuals, government sectors, enterprises, and celebrities for expressing varied opinions and preferences (Sarwar 10,11) Alternatively, when the whole world is constantly evolving world around us, the information which is shared completely on the basis of every individuals' understanding of that matter, it is leading to a transformed version of the actual purpose and meaning which is further leading to the evolution of the generation. This is leading the curious minds present across the country which we now call as youth, to dig deeper into the information, to get into the depth and purpose of every ritual which is being followed and practiced, and the tradition which is being followed and adapted across by various individuals. The one who succeeds to make people persuade about their perspective, it is the one who succeeds to shape the perception of the culture. Social media being one of the easiest sources of gathering information, youth prefer to use these platforms as an original source of information without authorization.

What is Culture?

Culture is a mixture of beliefs, values, rituals, traditions, artifacts, language, and material being followed and adapted by a group of individuals. It is depicted through various aspects of life including knowledge, laws, customs, food, clothing, music, art, family structure, lifestyle, social interactions, etc. The origin of any culture is often from the land an individual lives, their lifestyle factors, and their learnings from the society.

Review of Literature:

Social media is growing at a rapid pace with trendy and animated features around which succeeds to make youth stay on the platform for longer duration, share perspectives along with sharing their experiences of different cultural narratives. As there is no limit for the content which

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is consumed digitally, these platforms in collaboration with content creators are making sure to leverage by creating spaces for cultural learning, exchange, and the shaping of personal identities. Researchers have examined this evolving relation by recognizing that while social media offers valuable opportunities for cultural exploration. On the other hand, it also presents a few challenges in promoting genuine cultural understanding.

Breathing and social media may as well go hand in hand for a modern youth and not using it feels like missing a big shot. Social media has no age restrictions and people from different age groups take part in it with an average Indian spending almost two and a half hours a day on it. Social media users aged 13 to 19 account for 31% of the total social media user base in India (Statista, 2021). As well as the other social networking sites, Facebook and Instagram are mostly used by Indian youths as well students aged 18 to 24. We consider the social media usage among youngsters within negative and positive scopes in this research. (Dar et al. 10,11)

Social media with its interactive interface has transformed how people engage in discussions, influencing public attitudes and policy debates. These platforms enable diverse opinions but often contribute to growing societal divisions. Social Media's widespread use by individuals, organizations, and public figures offers a valuable lens into societal trends and shifting behaviors. However, easy access and connectivity can also confine users within like-minded groups, reducing exposure to differing views and increasing polarization. Moreover, the rapid sharing of content, including misinformation, along with the amplified voices of influencers and celebrities, often shapes public discourse and impacts collective behavior, particularly among youth. (Sarwar 10,11)

Exposure to external ideas often leads to shifts in social values and behaviors, sometimes at the expense of local cultures. In societies like Algeria, this creates a constant struggle between adapting to global trends and preserving national identity. By understanding the patterns of individuals' engagement with social media and how it impacts their values and relationships is key to analyzing these cultural transformations. (Samia FARFAR and Aicha MAKHLOUFI 10,11)

In the ever-expanding social media ecosystem, individuals who belong to diverse cultural backgrounds have access not only to communicate, but also to share cultural values, beliefs, and norms. This provides a unique opportunity to observe the influence of social media on the cultural integration process. (Ruhana et al. 10,11)

Social Media has become a Tool for Cultural Exposure

According to Boyd (2014) (D. 10,11), social media platforms serve as virtual spaces where young users encounter diverse traditions, customs, and views across the world that may differ from their own. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram offer content that ranges from cultural celebrations and traditional practices to daily life experiences across the globe. This exposure potentially broadens the cultural horizons of youth and fosters empathy towards people from different backgrounds. Moreover, Jenkins (2006) (Jenkins and H. 13) points out participatory culture on social media allows users not only to consume but also to create and share cultural

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content, making the process of cultural exchange more dynamic and interactive.

Cross-Cultural Communication and Identity Formation

Social media offers young users the opportunity to interact directly with individuals of the same age group and demographics from different cultural backgrounds. Such interactions contribute to intercultural competence and understanding (Chen & Zhang, 2010) (Chen et al. 10,11). Through online discussions, comments, and collaborations, users negotiate cultural meanings, sometimes reshaping their own cultural identities. Social networking sites often serve as spaces where hybrid cultural identities emerge, influenced by both local and global cultural elements (Giddens, 1991) (Giddens and A. 10,11)

Challenges: Misinformation, Stereotypes, and Superficiality

Despite its potential benefits, social media even represents a number of risks for cultural misrepresentation and stereotyping. (Sunstein and C. R. 10,11) argues that algorithm-driven content curation can create echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints and reinforce existing biases. Additionally, scholars like (Nakamura and L. 10,11) have highlighted the prevalence of cultural appropriation and tokenism in digital spaces, where cultural symbols are often reduced to aesthetic trends stripped of their original significance.

Short-form content formats, particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, have raised insecurity and concerns about the depth of cultural understanding. While such content is easily accessible and engaging, it often presents oversimplified versions of complex cultural practices (Livingstone and S. 10,11). This superficial engagement risks promoting stereotypical or incomplete knowledge about a culture rather than fostering meaningful understanding.

Social Media as an Educational Resource for Cultural Learning

Recent studies advocate for the constructive use of social media platforms as tools for intercultural education. According to (Koc et al. 10,11), integrating digital platforms into environments that foster education and learning can enhance students' cultural awareness and global competencies. Educational content creators and cultural organizations have begun leveraging social media to share well-researched and authentic cultural knowledge, opening up new avenues for virtual cultural learning.

Research Methodology:

This research has followed a mixed-methodology approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to comprehensively study the impact of social media content created across various platforms on the cultural perceptions of youth. The study aims to gather real-time insights into different behavioral patterns of individuals, their perceptions, and attitudes of young social media users concerning cultural content shared online.

1. Research Design:

The nature of the study is descriptive, and seeks to describe & emphasize on the patterns of the

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use of social media and influence it has on cultural understanding of youth. In order to meet the required purpose, a structured questionnaire was developed which encompassed both - The close-ended (quantitative) and The open-ended (qualitative) questions.

2. Data Collection:

The Primary data was being collected through an online survey shared via Google Forms across individuals of age group 18 years old to 27 years old. The questionnaire was designed in a way so as to capture key variables such as:

- Frequency of social media usage,
- Preferred platforms,
- Interaction with cultural content,
- Perceptions of authenticity,
- Influence on personal beliefs and cultural understanding.

3. Sampling Method and Respondent Profile:

- Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling was adapted in this research process due to easy accessibility to respondents who are active on social media platforms.
- Target Group: Young individuals aged between 18 to 27 years formed the core sample.
- Sample Size: A total of 5 responses were collected, representing preliminary insights into the topic.

4. Data Analysis:

- Quantitative Data: Analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages, and trends.
- Qualitative Data: Responses to open-ended questions were interpreted thematically to extract meaningful patterns and opinions.

This methodological framework was designed to ensure a balanced understanding of how social media influences youth's cultural perceptions, considering both numerical data and individual narratives.

Data Interpretation:

Aspect Studied	Observations
Age Group	Out of the respondents the highest numbers of the respondents were in the 23-27 age group.
Social Media Usage Frequency	Most participants use social media constantly (several times a day) indicating high exposure.

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Popular Platforms	Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn emerged as the most frequently used platforms.
Engagement with Cultural Content	Mixed responses: - 2 Yes - 1 No - 2 Maybe Engagement mainly with Value-Based, Rituals-Based, Dressing-Based, Festival-Based, and Belief-Based content.
Type of Cultural Content Consumed	Informative, Educational, Entertainment, and Spiritual content was common.
Impact on Cultural Understanding	80% of respondents have displayed their agreement that social media increased their

	understanding of various cultures.
Perception of Authenticity	- 1 Yes - 3 Maybe - 1 No Many are skeptical about the authenticity of cultural content.
Influence on Beliefs	3 Yes, 1 Maybe, 1 No — Denotes that social media platforms and their content can influence cultural beliefs.
Change in Perception through Social Media	3 Yes, 2 Maybe — Respondents experienced perception changes about cultures through social media.
Interaction with Different Cultures	2 Frequently, 1 Occasionally, 1 Rarely, 1 Never
Promotion of Authentic Culture by Social Media	1 Yes Frequently, 4 Rarely — Indicates a general doubt about authenticity promotion.
Encounter with Misinformation	4 Frequently, 1 Occasionally — Cultural misrepresentation is common.
Verification of Cultural Content	Methods used: - Cross-checking reliable sources - Following verified pages - Discussion with friends - Some do not verify at all
Suggested Content Type (Qualitative)	- Educational and factual content - Genuine and authentic stories - Creative storytelling - Religious content - Realistic portrayals

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Findings

Based on the interpretation of the collected data, several key findings emerge:

1. **Social Media as a Dominant / Leading Cultural Medium:** The youth are integrated in depth into social media ecosystems. Platforms like Instagram dominate how individuals consume the cultural content based on their preferences for visual appeal and diverse content availability.
2. **Multifaceted Cultural Content:** The engagement with cultural content created on social media is not just limited to a particular form of content or designs being created. Rather, the youth interact with content which is based on diverse rituals, festivals, dressing, language, value based content created in informative, educational, and entertaining format; indicating a broad spectrum of cultural curiosity.
3. **Skepticism for the Content Authenticity:** Albeit social media being the leading source of content and information consumption source, it has created a huge opportunity to understand cultures followed across the world. However, they have missed creating a platform to authorize the content which is consumed. Though individuals are getting educated and informed through the content, there is a growing skepticism about the authenticity of the content. The youth while verifying find it difficult to just rely on social media for the content consumed and hence look for the ways to authenticate the same and distinguish between factual representations and manipulated narratives.
4. **The Power to Influence One's Beliefs:** Out of the responses which were received, majority of them acknowledged that their beliefs and perceptions are being shaped as per the content they are consuming through any source of the media platforms. This showcases the potential of the platform to bridge the cultural gap and shape the forces.
5. **The Ease of Passing of Cultural Misinformation:** Social media providing ease to share information, the content consumers encounter with misrepresentation and misinformation, which reinforces concerns about the platforms' role in preserving cultural stereotypes or inaccuracies.

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6. Inconsistent verification practices: Not all users take efforts to verify the content which is consumed. This passive consumption of information is leading to questioning of the authenticity of the content consumed. Which furthermore is increasing the risk of internalizing false cultural narratives.
7. Increase in need for Creative and Educational Content: The respondents emphasized the necessity for more creative storytelling in the content shared to increase the engagement ratio. In order to make content consumption and verification easy, the creators and platforms should push more fact-based content which educates individuals along with entertaining them, and genuine representation of cultures. There is a clear requirement for content that balances entertainment with cultural accuracy.

Conclusion:

The research emphasizes the significant impact social media has on today's youth understanding social diversity. Initially serving as a source of entertainment, which later advanced as a means of communication, it now acts as an interactive platform where cultural values, beliefs and traditions can be shared, discussed, contested, and at times, redeveloped. Despite the younger generation's willingness to learn about different cultures, there is a more urgent duty to perform regarding responsible content translation. Influencers, creators, and social media platforms should promote authenticity, veracity, and ingenuity while using cultures as subjects. There is a need for entertaining and educational work portraying cultures in a factual and not derogatory manner, which is needed to raise audiences that are informed as well as sensitive to cultures. To conclude, social media can serve as an effective cross-cultural communication and global awareness platform, which other cultures may be looking for. Realization of such an objective is achievable when users are guided to critically analyze the content they view and when creators pay attention to the effects of their stories. Efforts should be directed towards creating an online space that enables the glorification of cultures, accuracy checking, and as well as offering respect to all cultures irrespective of them.

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