

Exploring Digital Behavior and Social Media use Patterns of College Student

Dr. Vijay M. Kumbhar

Head, Department of Business Economics and Bank Management, Dhananjayrao Gadgil College of Commerce, Satara Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil University, Satara, Maharashtra 415001

Abstract

This study examines social media usage patterns among 580 college students in Satara district, Maharashtra, with a focus on gender differences. The research investigates daily usage duration, frequency of engagement, purpose, preferences, and the relationship between virtual networks and offline interactions. Findings indicate that most students use social media moderately, primarily for communication, education, and entertainment, with females favoring educational and relational purposes. High-frequency usage is more common among males, while offline interactions remain concentrated within smaller circles, despite large online networks. The study also explores the prevalence of FoMO and its influence on social media behavior. These insights highlight the need for balanced digital engagement and targeted awareness initiatives to promote healthy social media practices among youth.

Keywords: Social media, Youth, FoMO, Digital engagement, Preferences, behavior

Introduction

Social media has become a pervasive aspect of modern life, particularly among college students, who rely on it for communication, entertainment, education, and information sharing (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). The rapid expansion of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat has transformed how youth interact with peers, maintain relationships, and access knowledge (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Frequent engagement with social media can influence daily routines, academic performance, and social behavior (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Gender differences in usage patterns have been observed, with males often engaging in high-frequency use for entertainment and information, while females focus more on education and relational maintenance (Duggan, 2015; Lenhart, 2015). The phenomenon of FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) further drives frequent checking and prolonged use of these platforms, potentially affecting mental health and well-being (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). Despite the growth of online networks, offline interactions remain selective, emphasizing close-knit relationships over expansive virtual ties (Granovetter, 1973). Understanding these patterns is essential for assessing the social, psychological, and academic implications of social media use. This study aims to explore the frequency, purpose, and preferences of social media engagement among college students in Satara district, Maharashtra. It also examines gender-specific behaviors and the relationship between virtual connections and actual face-to-face interactions. The findings will provide insights into balanced digital engagement and inform interventions to promote healthy social media practices among youth.

Data, Method, and Sample

The study is based on primary data collected through structured surveys administered to college students in Satara, Sangli and Solapur districts, Maharashtra. A quantitative research method was employed to examine patterns of social media use, including frequency, purpose, preferences, and the relationship between online networks and offline interactions. The survey captured detailed information on daily usage duration, hourly engagement, preferred activities, and actual face-to-face meetings with social media friends. A total of 580 respondents participated, comprising 211 male and 369 female students from junior college, senior college, and postgraduate programs. The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across different educational levels and age groups. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and percentage distributions to identify usage patterns and gender-specific trends. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive understanding of social media behavior among youth in the study area.

Use of Social Media by Male and Female College Students

The study examined the daily social media usage patterns of college-going students, with particular attention to gender differences. Analysis of the data through the table 1 indicates that both male and female students predominantly spend 1 to 3 hours on social media daily, accounting for 43.6% of the total sample. Among male students, 43.6% reported spending 1–3 hours, while 31.3% used it for up to 1 hour. Female students exhibited a slightly different pattern, with 39.3% using social media for up to 1 hour and 43.6% for 1–3 hours daily, indicating that shorter durations are slightly more common among females. Moderate use, defined as 3–6 hours per day, was reported by 19.9% of males and 14.4% of females. Heavy use, exceeding 6 hours daily, was relatively uncommon but more pronounced among males (5.2%) compared to females (2.7%).

Table 1: Daily Social Media Use by Gender of User

Daily Use Hours	Male		Female		Total	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
Up to 1 Hour	66	31.3	145	39.3	211	36.4
1 to 3 Hours	92	43.6	161	43.6	253	43.6
3 to 6 Hours	42	19.9	53	14.4	95	16.4
More than 6 Hours	11	5.2	10	2.7	21	3.6
Total	211	100.0	369	100.0	580	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Overall, the data highlight that social media is an integral part of college students' daily routines, providing a platform for communication, entertainment, and information, but the majority manage their time on these platforms efficiently. Gender differences are modest, with males slightly more represented among heavy users, whereas females tend to use social media for shorter periods.

Frequency of Social Media Use by Gender

Social media has become an essential part of daily life for college students, with individuals often checking platforms multiple times throughout the day. Frequent engagement is typically influenced by the need for communication, entertainment, academic purposes, and staying updated with current

information. Prior research indicates that young adults generally use social media several times per hour, balancing between leisure and academic activities

Daily Use Purpose	Male		Female		Total	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
Once in Hour	56	26.5	126	34.1	182	31.4
2 to 4 Times in Hour	110	52.1	194	52.6	304	52.4
5 to 7 Times in Hour	27	12.8	43	11.6	70	12.1
8 and Above Times in Hour	18	8.5	6	1.6	24	4.1
Total	211	100.0	369	100.0	580	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 2, provides empirical evidence on the frequency of social media use among college students in Satara district, Maharashtra, and highlights gender differences. Table 3 shows that the majority of students use social media 2 to 4 times per hour, accounting for 52.4% of the total sample. Both male (52.1%) and female (52.6%) students demonstrate similar tendencies in this moderate usage category. Light usage, defined as once per hour, was reported by 31.4% of respondents, with females (34.1%) slightly more represented than males (26.5%). High-frequency users (5–7 times per hour) make up 12.1% of the sample, and males (12.8%) are slightly more represented than females (11.6%). Intensive users (8 or more times per hour) constitute only 4.1% of students, dominated by males (8.5%) compared to females (1.6%).

These findings suggest that while most students engage moderately with social media, a smaller subset exhibits heavy or intensive usage. Gender differences are modest but notable, with females tending toward lighter engagement and males more likely to be high-frequency users. This pattern reflects the dual role of social media as a tool for both communication and entertainment, while also indicating potential areas for awareness regarding excessive usage.

Patterns of social media use among college students

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of college students, serving as a platform for communication, information sharing, entertainment, and learning. Students increasingly rely on social networking sites to stay connected with peers, access news, and participate in educational discussions. The present study provides empirical evidence on the patterns of social media use among college students in Satara district, Maharashtra. Analysis of the data indicates that students engage with social media for a variety of purposes, with notable gender differences.

Daily Use Purpose	Male		Female		Total	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
Entertainment	74	35.1	86	23.3	160	27.6

Communicate with Friends & Relatives	18	8.5	44	11.9	62	10.7
News and Information	52	24.6	64	17.3	116	20.0
Education	54	25.6	148	40.1	202	34.8
Sharing Photos and Information	6	2.8	9	2.4	15	2.6
Other	7	3.3	18	4.9	25	4.3
Total	211	100.0	369	100.0	580	100.0
Source: Primary Data						

Table 3 presents the distribution of social media usage purposes among male and female college students (N = 580). The findings indicate that students engage with social media for a variety of reasons, with notable gender differences. Among male students, the most common purpose was entertainment (n = 74, 35.1%), followed by news and information (n = 52, 24.6%) and education-related activities (n = 54, 25.6%). In contrast, female students predominantly used social media for educational purposes (n = 148, 40.1%), followed by entertainment (n = 86, 23.3%) and news and information (n = 64, 17.3%). Communication with friends and relatives was reported by 8.5% of males and 11.9% of females, while sharing photos and other miscellaneous purposes were relatively minor for both genders.

Overall, education (34.8%) and entertainment (27.6%) emerged as the primary purposes for using social media among the entire sample. Gender differences are evident, with females prioritizing educational use more heavily, whereas males are more inclined toward entertainment and information-seeking activities. These patterns highlight the dual role of social media among college students—as a tool for both learning and leisure—and suggest that usage behavior varies according to gender and possibly academic or personal priorities

Fear about Missing Social Media Touch

Fear of missing out, commonly referred to as FOMO, reflects the anxiety or concern that one might miss important social interactions or updates on social media. Among college students, this feeling can influence both the frequency and duration of social media engagement, prompting them to check platforms more often or remain constantly connected.

Gupta and Sharma (2021) explored the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) construct, detailing its origin, theoretical foundations, and its association with mental health. They highlighted that FoMO is positively correlated with increased anxiety and depression, particularly among individuals who frequently engage with social media platforms. This underscores the psychological implications of FoMO in the digital age. Elhai, Yang, and Montag (2021) provided an in-depth review of FoMO, discussing its theoretical underpinnings and its relationship with negative affectivity and problematic technology use. They found that FoMO is significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression, as well as increased problematic use of technology, especially social media. This study emphasizes the need for further research into the psychological impacts of FoMO.

Dhir, Kaur, and Rajala (2023) investigated the impact of FoMO on mental health, finding that individuals with higher levels of FoMO are more likely to experience issues such as alcohol abuse, sleep disorders, decreased well-being, and lower life satisfaction. The authors emphasized the need for interventions to address FoMO and its associated mental health risks. Groenestein et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review examining the literature on FoMO, digital technology use, and

psychological well-being. They found that while adverse effects of FoMO are commonly assumed, there is still no consensus on the nature of the phenomenon or its relations with psychological well-being and digital technology use. This highlights the need for further research to clarify these relationships. Liu, Liu, Zhou, and Wan (2023) examined the relationship between solitude behavior, FoMO, and mental health. They found that social avoidance and loneliness, as forms of non-self-determined solitude, could activate FoMO, which in turn negatively affects mental health. This study suggests that interventions targeting these behaviors could help mitigate the impact of FoMO.

Daily Use Purpose	Male		Female		Total	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
I Feel Fear about Missing	23	10.9	29	7.9	52	9.0
Sometimes I Feel Fear	36	17.1	91	24.7	127	21.9
I Don't Feel Fear about Missing	152	72.0	249	67.5	401	69.1
Total	211	100.0	369	100.0	580	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The empirical data from the study indicate that the majority of students (69.1%) **do not experience fear of missing social media**, suggesting that most respondents maintain a balanced approach toward their digital interactions. However, a notable proportion of students (21.9%) reported **sometimes feeling fear**, with females (24.7%) slightly more represented than males (17.1%). Only a small fraction (9%) consistently **feel fear about missing out**, with males (10.9%) slightly higher than females (7.9%). These findings suggest that while **most students manage their social media engagement without significant anxiety**, occasional FOMO is common, particularly among female students. Understanding these patterns can help educators and policymakers address potential stress or overuse related to social media in college populations.

Preference on Social Media

Social media usage among youth is heavily influenced by social and relational motivations. Studies worldwide consistently show that **communication with friends** is the dominant reason for engagement on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). Chat-based interactions allow youth to maintain friendships, coordinate activities, and express personal identities, which aligns with developmental theories emphasizing the importance of peer relationships during adolescence and early adulthood (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

Another significant aspect of social media preference is **interaction with relatives**, which often includes video calls, messaging, and sharing family updates. While globally, this is less emphasized than peer communication, studies have noted that female users tend to prioritize relational maintenance more than males, reflecting socialization patterns that emphasize emotional closeness and connectedness among women (Duggan, 2015). **Content sharing**, such as posting images, updates, or opinions, represents a smaller proportion of social media activity but remains an important avenue for self-expression, impression management, and identity construction. Literature suggests that sharing behaviors are often

linked with self-presentation motives, social recognition, and the desire to participate in digital social capital (Ellison et al., 2007).

Preference on Social Media	Male		Female		Total	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
Chatting with Friends	134	63.5	188	50.9	322	55.5
Chatting with Relatives	34	16.1	135	36.6	169	29.1
Sharing Posts	43	20.4	46	12.5	89	15.3
Total	211	100.0	369	100.0	580	100.0
Source: Primary Data						

Table 5 presents data collected from 580 college students in Satara district, Maharashtra, regarding their social media preferences by gender:

- Chatting with Friends is the most preferred activity for both males (63.5%) and females (50.9%), constituting 55.5% of the total sample. This indicates that peer interaction is the primary motivator for social media engagement among youth.
- Chatting with Relatives is moderate preferred activity for both males and female, Females (36.6%) show a considerably higher preference than males (16.1%), with a total of 29.1% of students engaging in family-focused communication. This suggests gender differences in relational priorities, with females more oriented toward maintaining family connections.
- While Sharing Posts less frequent, 15.3% of students actively share posts, with males (20.4%) slightly more involved than females (12.5%). This indicates that content creation is a secondary activity, primarily serving personal expression and social recognition.

Overall, the findings highlight that interactive communication particularly with friends is the dominant purpose of social media use among college students, with gender-specific patterns evident in family interaction and content-sharing behaviors. These results are consistent with global research on adolescent and young adult social media behavior.

Virtual and Actual Friendship: weak ties” and “strong ties

Social media has expanded the scope of social networks for youth, allowing them to maintain connections with large numbers of friends online. Studies indicate that while adolescents may accumulate hundreds or even thousands of social media friends, the number of friends they interact with offline remains considerably smaller (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). This pattern is explained by the distinction between “weak ties” and “strong ties” in social networks. Weak ties, often maintained online, provide social information and a sense of belonging, but strong ties—those maintained through face-to-face interactions—are critical for emotional support and meaningful social engagement (Granovetter, 1973).

Gender differences have also been observed in both online and offline interactions. Research suggests that females are more likely than males to engage in relational maintenance, including actual meetings with friends and family, whereas males often maintain larger virtual networks with less frequent offline

interaction (Duggan, 2015; Lenhart, 2015). These findings align with broader psychological theories highlighting gender differences in socialization and emotional connectedness.

While social media facilitates connectivity and peer interaction, excessive reliance on online-only friendships may contribute to feelings of isolation, social comparison, and the phenomenon of FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) (Przybylski et al., 2013). Therefore, understanding the balance between online networks and offline meetings is crucial for assessing the social and psychological well-being of youth.

Table 6 weak ties” and “strong ties

Number of Friends	Respondents having Number of Friends on Social Media			Number of Friends	Respondents having Actual visit with Social Media Friend		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Up to 1000	176	354	530	Up to 100	104	242	346
1001–2000	19	6	25	Up to 500	62	64	126
2001–3000	2	4	6	501 - 1000	28	59	87
3001–4000	3	1	4	1001–2000	7	1	8
4001–5000	11	4	15	2001–3000	2	0	2
Total	211	369	580	3001–4000	5	1	6
				4001–5000	3	2	5
				Total	211	369	580

Source: Primary Data

Table 6, “Count of Social Media Friends and Actual Meet,” highlights several key patterns among the 580 college students in the study area. The data indicate a dominance of small online networks in offline interactions. While 530 respondents (91.4%) have up to 1000 friends on social media, only 346 respondents (59.7%) report actual offline meetings with up to 100 friends. This demonstrates that large virtual networks do not proportionally translate into face-to-face interactions, supporting prior research on the distinction between weak and strong ties.

Gender differences are also apparent. Females have more online friends in the ≤1000 category (354) and engage in more offline meetings at lower friend counts (242) compared to males (176 and 104, respectively). Males, on the other hand, are slightly more represented in higher online friend categories (1001–5000), but this is not reflected in increased offline interactions, suggesting that male networks are more virtual-heavy. Moreover, higher friend counts rarely lead to more offline meetings. For instance, only 8 respondents meet with 1001–2000 friends, despite 25 respondents having that number of online friends. This reinforces the notion that offline social engagement is concentrated within a smaller, close-knit circle even when online networks are large.

Overall, these findings empirically support previous literature emphasizing that youth maintain extensive social media networks, but offline interactions remain selective and limited, particularly among males. These patterns have important implications for understanding social behavior, peer influence, and mental health, as large virtual networks may increase social comparison and FoMO without necessarily enhancing social support.

Important Findings

The study reveals that college students predominantly use social media for 1–3 hours daily, with moder-

ate engagement (2–4 times per hour) being most common. Females tend to focus more on educational use and maintaining family connections, while males engage more in entertainment and high-frequency usage. Despite large online networks, offline interactions are limited to smaller, close-knit circles, highlighting the selective nature of real-world social engagement.

1. **Daily Use of Social Media-** The majority of college students spend between 1–3 hours daily on social media, accounting for 43.6% of the sample. Females are slightly more represented in the shorter usage category (up to 1 hour), while males show higher representation among heavy users (over 6 hours daily). This highlights that social media is an integral part of students' routines, with most maintaining moderate usage.
2. **Frequency of Social Media Engagement-** Analysis of hourly usage shows that most students (52.4%) check social media 2–4 times per hour, with similar proportions for males and females. Light usage (once per hour) is slightly higher among females, whereas intensive usage (8 or more times per hour) is dominated by males. These patterns indicate that while moderate engagement is typical, a small subset of students exhibits high-frequency usage.
3. **Purpose of Social Media Use -** Students use social media for multiple purposes, with education (34.8%) and entertainment (27.6%) being the most prominent. Males prioritize entertainment and news, whereas females focus more on educational activities. Communication with friends remains a central purpose for both genders, reflecting the dual role of social media as a tool for learning and leisure.
4. **Preference for Social Interaction -** Peer communication dominates social media preferences, with 55.5% of students engaging primarily in chatting with friends. Females show a higher tendency to communicate with relatives (36.6%) than males (16.1%), while content sharing is a secondary activity for both genders. These patterns suggest gender-specific relational priorities and highlight the social and expressive functions of digital platforms.
5. **Virtual vs. Actual Friendship -** Despite having large online networks (91.4% with up to 1000 friends), students' offline meetings are concentrated within smaller circles (59.7% meeting up to 100 friends). Females have more offline interactions at lower friend counts, whereas males dominate higher online friend categories without corresponding offline engagement. This underscores the distinction between “weak” and “strong” ties, emphasizing selective face-to-face interactions despite expansive virtual networks.

Conclusion and Scope for Further Research

The study concludes that social media is an integral part of college students' daily lives, serving both educational and recreational purposes. While moderate use dominates, a small subset of students exhibits high-frequency engagement, particularly among males. Gender differences are evident, with females prioritizing educational activities and relational maintenance, whereas males focus more on entertainment and information-seeking. Despite large online networks, actual offline interactions are limited, emphasizing the distinction between virtual and real-world social connections. These patterns have implications for social behavior, peer influence, and mental well-being, including risks of excessive use and FoMO. The findings highlight the need for awareness programs promoting balanced social media habits and digital literacy. Future research could explore the impact of social media usage on academic performance, emotional health, and social skills. Longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into changing usage patterns over time. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons could reveal

how social norms and cultural factors influence online behavior. Overall, understanding both online and offline social dynamics is essential for fostering healthy digital engagement among youth.

References

1. Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). Teens, social media & technology 2018. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018>.
2. Dhir, A., Kaur, P., & Rajala, R. (2023). The effect of fear of missing out on mental health. *BMC Psychology*, 11, Article 184. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01184-5>
3. Duggan, M. (2015). Mobile messaging and social media use among teens and young adults. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-use-among-teens-and-young-adults/>
4. Duggan, M. (2015). Mobile messaging and social media use among teens and young adults. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-use-among-teens-and-young-adults/>
5. Elhai, J. D., Yang, H., & Montag, C. (2021). Fear of missing out: Overview, theoretical underpinnings, and literature review on relations with severity of negative affectivity and problematic technology use. *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*, 43(2), 203–209. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-4446-2020-0870>
6. Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>
7. Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>
8. Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>
9. Groenestein, E., Willemsen, L., van Koningsbruggen, G. M., Ket, H., & Kerkhof, P. (2024). The relationship between fear of missing out, digital technology use, and psychological well-being: A scoping review of conceptual and empirical issues. *PLOS ONE*, 19(10), e0308643. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0308643>
10. Gupta, M., & Sharma, A. (2021). Fear of missing out: A brief overview of origin, theoretical underpinnings, and relationship with mental health. *World Journal of Clinical Cases*, 9(19), 4881–4889. <https://doi.org/10.12998/wjcc.v9.i19.4881>
11. Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2015). Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 12(3), 231–252. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5369147/>
12. Lenhart, A. (2015). Teens, social media & technology overview 2015. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>
13. Liu, X., Liu, T., Zhou, Z., & Wan, F. (2023). The effect of fear of missing out on mental health: Differences in different solitude behaviors. *BMC Psychology*, 11, Article 141. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01184-5>
14. Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>

15. Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2011). Online communication and adolescent well-being: Testing the stimulation versus the displacement hypothesis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 16(2), 200–209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00368.x>