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Social media and its impact: A comprehensive review

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Abstract

Social media has emerged as a transformative digital technology that has significantly influenced communication, information sharing, education, business, healthcare, governance, and social interactions worldwide. This review paper examines the concept, evolution, characteristics, components, usage patterns, impacts, and future trends of social media through a comprehensive analysis of secondary literature published between 2000 and 2025. The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach, drawing upon peer-reviewed research articles, books, reports, and institutional publications to synthesize existing knowledge on the subject. The review highlights the dual nature of social media by examining both its positive and negative impacts and explores emerging trends, including artificial intelligence integration, algorithmic personalization, creator economies, and social commerce, which are reshaping the digital landscape. The findings emphasize the need for digital literacy, ethical platform governance, responsible user behavior, and effective policy frameworks to maximize the benefits of social media while mitigating its associated risks. Thus social media remains a powerful yet complex force shaping contemporary society and future digital interactions.

Keywords: Social media, digital innovation, digital communication and social media impact

Introduction

Social media has emerged as one of the most influential technological innovations of the 21st century, fundamentally transforming communication, information exchange, education, business, politics, and social interactions. Social media platforms enable users to create, share, and engage with user-generated content in real time, fostering global connectivity and digital communities. The rapid growth of smartphones, internet accessibility, and digital technologies has accelerated social media adoption worldwide. According to Data Reportal's latest global statistics, there were approximately 5.66 billion social media user identities worldwide in 2025, representing more than two-thirds of the global population and over 93% of internet users. Social media continues to grow by approximately 259 million new users annually, highlighting its expanding influence across societies. In India, social media has become a major component of digital life. Recent reports indicate that India hosts approximately 500 million social media users, making it one of the largest social media markets globally. Indian users spend an average of 3.2 hours per day on social media platforms, reflecting the deep integration of social networking into everyday activities. Recent studies reveal changing patterns of social media consumption. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and emerging platforms continue to dominate digital communication. Research by Pew Research Center found that YouTube remains the most widely used platform, followed by Facebook and Instagram, while younger populations increasingly favor short-video and interactive platforms. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), recommendation algorithms, influencer marketing, social commerce, and short-form video content has further transformed the social media ecosystem, making these platforms central to information consumption and public discourse. Despite numerous benefits, growing evidence suggests that excessive social media use may contribute to adverse psychological and social outcomes. A comprehensive review published in *Nature Reviews Psychology* (2024) reported that social media can affect adolescent mental health through mechanisms such as social comparison, exposure to harmful content, disrupted sleep, and cyberbullying. The review emphasized that the effects vary according to individual vulnerabilities and usage patterns. Furthermore, a large longitudinal study involving over 4,000 adolescents found that individuals exhibiting addictive social media

behaviors were two to three times more likely to experience suicidal ideation and emotional difficulties compared with their peers. Importantly, the study highlighted that compulsive use, rather than overall screen time, was the primary risk factor. Systematic reviews also indicate that social media platforms can contribute to anxiety, depression, body image concerns, and problematic internet use, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

Rationale for the Review

Given the unprecedented growth of social media and its widespread influence on individual behavior and societal functioning, a comprehensive understanding of its positive and negative impacts is essential. Existing studies often focus on specific dimensions such as mental health, communication, education, or business applications. However, there remains a need for an integrated review that synthesizes contemporary evidence regarding the multidimensional effects of social media on individuals and society. This review therefore seeks to critically examine the current body of literature on social media and its impacts, highlighting both opportunities and challenges while identifying emerging trends and future research directions.

Methodology

This review paper employs a qualitative and descriptive research methodology based on secondary data sources to examine the impact of social media on individuals and society. The study synthesizes interdisciplinary literature from communication, psychology, sociology, education, health, and media studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with social media use.

Scope and Objectives

The review focuses on three interconnected areas: social media usage and trends, positive impacts of social media, and negative consequences of social media use. The key objectives are to examine the concept and evolution of social media, analyse its influence on communication, education, health, business, and social relationships, assess

emerging concerns such as misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy issues, and digital addiction, and identify future challenges and research directions.

Data Collection

Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, institutional reports (e.g., WHO, UNESCO, ITU, Pew Research Center, Data Reportal), policy documents, and academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Science Direct, Springer Link, and JSTOR. Literature searches employed relevant keywords related to social media, its usage patterns, impacts, trends, opportunities, challenges, and associated behavioral and societal outcomes. Preference was given to studies published between 2010 and 2026, along with seminal works relevant to the field.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The review included empirical studies, systematic reviews, theoretical papers, and institutional reports published in English between 2010 and 2026 that examined social media usage, impacts, trends, and user behavior. Studies unrelated to the objectives, duplicate publications, non-English documents, opinion-based articles without empirical evidence, and inaccessible sources were excluded.

Data Analysis

The selected literature was organized into thematic categories, including social media concepts and evolution, usage patterns, positive impacts, negative impacts, theoretical perspectives, and emerging trends. A narrative synthesis approach was used to compare findings, identify recurring themes, and draw evidence-based conclusions regarding the impact of social media on individuals and society.

Literature Review

For a review paper, instead of explaining each characteristic separately, a more scholarly approach is to present them under thematic headings with supporting research evidence. This reads more smoothly and looks more academic.

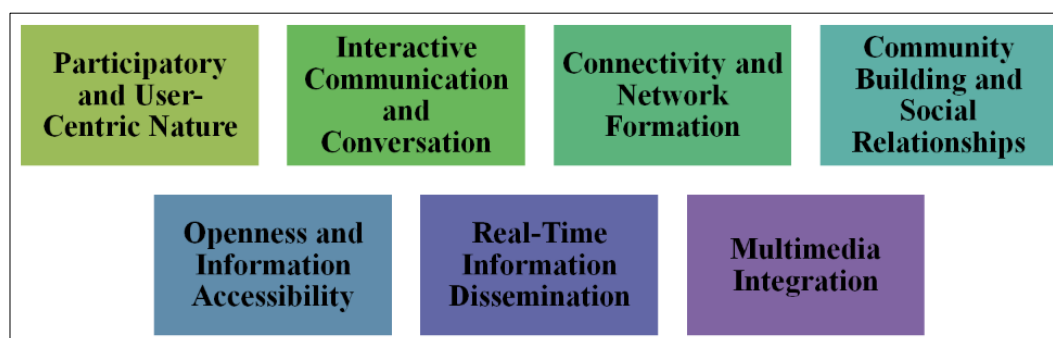


Fig 1: Characteristics and Components of Social Media

Participatory and User-Centric Nature: One of the most distinctive features of social media is its participatory nature. Users are active contributors who create and share content such as posts, videos, reviews, and blogs. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)^[14] identified user participation as the foundation of social media. The scale of participation is evident from YouTube, where over 500 hours of video content are uploaded every minute.

Interactive Communication and Conversation: Social media enables two-way communication through comments, likes, shares, and direct messaging. Unlike traditional media, users can instantly respond and interact with content. Kietzmann *et al.* (2011)^[18] identified conversations as a key functional component that enhances engagement, collaboration, and relationship building.

Connectivity and Network Formation: Social media connects individuals and organizations across geographical boundaries. Through friend networks, followers, and professional connections, users can exchange information and build relationships globally. Ellison *et al.* (2007) ^[9] found that such connectivity enhances social capital and access to information.

Community Building and Social Relationships: Social media facilitates the formation of online communities based on shared interests and goals. Examples include LinkedIn professional groups, educational forums, and farmer WhatsApp groups. These communities promote knowledge sharing, collaboration, and social support.

Openness and Information Accessibility: Social media encourages users to freely share information, opinions, and experiences. This openness supports public participation, advocacy, and citizen journalism. However, it also increases the risk of misinformation, privacy concerns, and information overload.

Real-Time Information Dissemination: A major strength of social media is the rapid dissemination of information. News, emergency alerts, and public health messages can reach millions of users instantly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became a primary source of real-time information and awareness.

Multimedia Integration: Social media supports diverse content formats, including text, images, audio, videos, live streams, and infographics. This multimedia capability increases user engagement and information retention. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok illustrate the growing preference for visual communication.

Functional Components of Social Media: The Honeycomb Framework

To explain how social media functions, Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) ^[18] proposed the Honeycomb Framework, which identifies seven key components that shape user interactions and platform dynamics. These components help explain how users communicate, share information, build relationships, and form online communities.

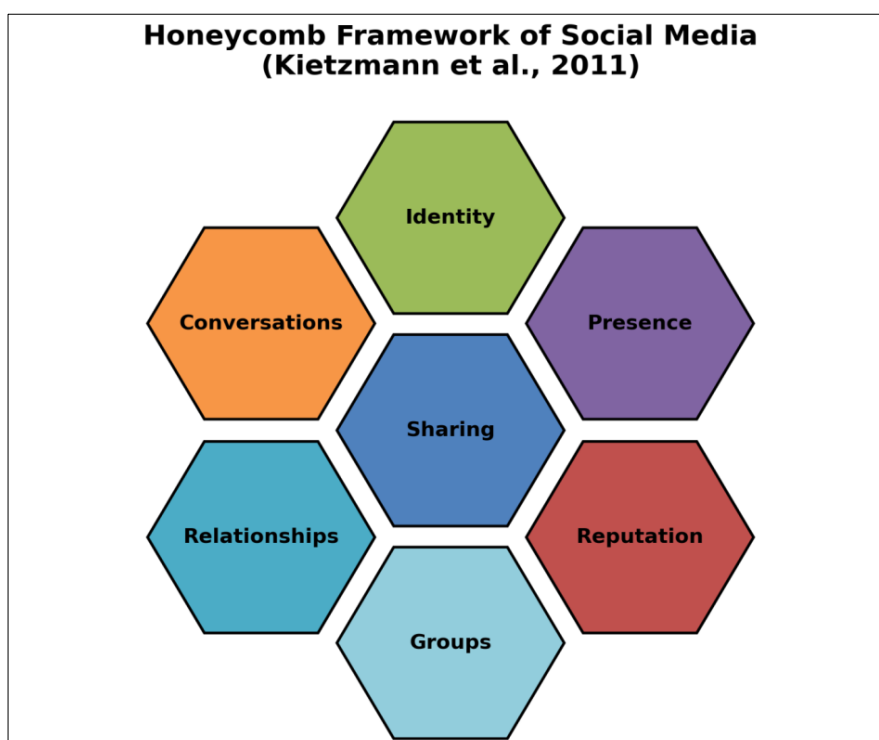


Table 1: Functional Components of Social Media (Honeycomb Framework)

Component	Description	Examples
Identity	Refers to the information users disclose about themselves, such as name, profile picture, interests, education, and occupation. It helps establish an online presence and build personal or professional networks.	Profile, bio, profile picture
Conversations	Represents communication among users through comments, chats, posts, and discussions. It facilitates interaction, knowledge exchange, and engagement.	Comments, direct messages, discussions
Sharing	Involves the exchange and distribution of content such as text, images, videos, and links. It enables rapid dissemination of information across networks.	Posts, reposts, video sharing
Presence	Refers to users' awareness of others' availability and activities online. Features such as online status and live streaming enhance real-time interaction.	Online status, activity indicators, live streams
Relationships	Describes the connections established among users, including friendships, followers, and professional contacts. These connections support networking and collaboration.	Friends, followers, LinkedIn connections
Reputation	Reflects the credibility, influence, and trustworthiness of users or content. It is often indicated by likes, ratings, reviews, and verification badges.	Likes, ratings, reviews, verified accounts
Groups	Refers to online communities formed around shared interests, professions, goals, or identities. They promote collaboration, learning, and community engagement.	Facebook Groups, WhatsApp Groups, Telegram Channels

Limitations of the Honeycomb Framework in the Contemporary Social Media Era

While the Honeycomb Framework remains one of the most influential models for understanding social media functionality, it was developed during the early stages of social media evolution. Since 2011, platforms have

undergone substantial transformation with the emergence of artificial intelligence, algorithm-driven content recommendation, influencer marketing, social commerce, and short-video platforms. Consequently, some contemporary aspects of social media are not fully captured by the original framework.

Table 2: Proposed Additional Components for Modern Social Media

Additional Component	Description	Examples
Personalization	AI algorithms tailor content according to user interests and behavior.	TikTok's "For You Page", Instagram Explore
Influence	Users with large followings shape opinions, purchasing decisions, and social trends.	Influencers, content creators, digital celebrities
Monetization	Platforms allow creators and businesses to generate revenue directly.	YouTube Partner Program, Instagram Creator Fund
Social Commerce	Integration of shopping and e-commerce within social media platforms.	Instagram Shops, Facebook Marketplace
Analytics and Metrics	Platforms provide detailed performance indicators to measure engagement and reach.	Insights, analytics dashboards
Algorithmic Curation	Content visibility is determined by recommendation algorithms rather than chronological order.	TikTok, Facebook, YouTube recommendations
Privacy and Security	Protection of user data and management of digital identities.	Privacy settings, data protection features
Artificial Intelligence Integration	AI assists content creation, moderation, recommendation, and engagement.	Meta AI, AI chatbots, automated content suggestions

Research Evidence Supporting the Expansion of the Honeycomb Framework

- **Personalization:** Recent social media platforms rely heavily on algorithmic personalization to recommend content based on users' interests and behavior. Appel *et al.* (2020) reported that personalized recommendations significantly influence content exposure, engagement, and consumer decision-making, suggesting that personalization has become a key component of modern social media.
- **Influence:** The growing creator economy has transformed social media users into influential opinion leaders. Dwivedi *et al.* (2021) highlighted influencer marketing as a major trend in digital communication, while industry reports estimate the global influencer marketing industry exceeded US\$24 billion in 2024, demonstrating the importance of influence in shaping user behavior.
- **Monetization:** Social media has evolved from a communication platform into a source of income generation. Kapoor *et al.* (2022) emphasized the rise of creator economies and platform monetization strategies, where content creators earn revenue through advertisements, sponsorships, subscriptions, and brand collaborations.
- **Social Commerce:** Social media increasingly serves as a marketplace for products and services. According to DataReportal (2025), nearly 64% of users use social media to search for brands, while over 50% discover products through recommended content, supporting the inclusion of social commerce as a distinct component.
- **Algorithmic Curation:** Content visibility on modern platforms is largely determined by recommendation algorithms rather than chronological feeds. Appel *et al.* (2020) and Dwivedi *et al.* (2021) noted that algorithmic systems play a crucial role in shaping information consumption, user engagement, and online behavior.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration:** Artificial intelligence now underpins many social media functions, including content recommendations,

automated moderation, chatbots, and content creation tools. Dwivedi *et al.* (2021) identified AI as a major force driving the future evolution of social media platforms, highlighting the need to recognize AI integration as an additional component of contemporary social media.

Global and Indian Scenario of Social Media Usage

Social media has become one of the most influential digital communication tools worldwide. According to the *Digital 2025 Global Overview Report*, there were approximately 5.24 billion social media users globally in 2025, accounting for more than 60% of the world's population. On average, internet users spend about 2 hours and 21 minutes per day on social media platforms, highlighting their growing role in communication, information seeking, entertainment, and commerce. India represents one of the largest and fastest-growing social media markets globally. DataReportal (2025) reported that India had approximately 491 million social media users, 806 million internet users, and 1.12 billion mobile connections. By late 2025, the number of social media users had increased to nearly 500 million, reflecting continued digital expansion.

The rapid growth of social media in India has been driven by affordable internet services, widespread smartphone adoption, and increasing availability of regional-language content. Platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram have become integral to daily communication, education, business, entertainment, and information dissemination. Recent estimates indicate that India hosts approximately 500 million YouTube users, 481 million Instagram users, and 403 million Facebook users, making it one of the largest user bases for major social networking platforms worldwide. Research suggests that social media usage is increasingly expanding beyond urban populations to rural and semi-urban areas, facilitating digital inclusion and access to information. The growing penetration of social media has transformed how individuals interact, learn, consume information, conduct business, and participate in social and civic activities, thereby making

social media a significant force shaping contemporary society. If this section comes before the detailed positive and negative impacts, keep it very concise and avoid discussing education, health, business, etc. in detail, otherwise there will be repetition later.

Impact of Social Media on Individuals and Society

Social media has emerged as a transformative force influencing communication, information sharing, social interactions, and public engagement. By enabling real-time connectivity and user-generated content, social media has changed how individuals access information, express opinions, build relationships, and participate in social and civic activities. With over 5.24 billion users worldwide and nearly 500 million users in India, social media has become an integral part of everyday life (DataReportal, 2025). Research suggests that social media creates opportunities for communication, learning, networking, collaboration, and economic participation while simultaneously raising concerns related to misinformation, privacy, cyberbullying, excessive usage, and mental well-being. The impact of

social media is therefore multidimensional, affecting individuals, communities, organizations, and society at large. Recent studies emphasize that the effects of social media depend not only on the amount of use but also on the purpose, quality, and nature of user engagement (Appel *et al.*, 2020; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). Given its widespread adoption and influence, social media has become a significant area of research across disciplines, prompting extensive investigation into its positive and negative implications for individuals and society.

Overview of the Positive Impacts of Social Media

Social media has positively influenced various aspects of individual and societal life, including communication, education, business, health, civic engagement, agriculture, and disaster management. Recent studies indicate that social media serves as a powerful tool for information dissemination, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and community development. The major positive impacts identified in the literature are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Positive Impacts of Social Media

Impact Area	Recent Study	Key Findings
Communication and Connectivity	Verduyn <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Social media strengthened interpersonal relationships and helped maintain social connections among geographically separated individuals.
Education and Learning	Denojean-Mairet <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Social media-based learning improved learner engagement, accessibility, collaboration, and self-directed learning.
Business, Marketing and Entrepreneurship	Mehta & Pradhan (2024)	Adoption of social media marketing among MSMEs improved customer engagement, brand visibility, and business performance.
Health Communication and Awareness	Kaňková <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Health-related social media influencers significantly influenced health awareness, attitudes, and preventive behaviors.
Social Support and Community Building	Long COVID Review (2024)	Online communities provided emotional support, information exchange, and a sense of belonging among affected individuals.
Political Participation and Civic Engagement	Gil de Zúñiga <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Social media use was positively associated with political discussion, civic participation, and public engagement.
Agricultural and Rural Development	Kumar <i>et al.</i> (2023)	WhatsApp and YouTube enhanced farmers' access to agricultural information, weather updates, and market intelligence.
Disaster Management and Crisis Communication	Houston <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Social media improved emergency communication, situational awareness, and public response during disasters.

Overview of the Negative Impacts of Social Media

Social media, despite its numerous benefits, has also generated significant concerns regarding its effects on individuals and society. Research has linked excessive and inappropriate social media use to mental health issues, addiction, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy risks,

reduced productivity, and social polarization. As social media platforms continue to expand their influence, understanding these challenges has become increasingly important for promoting responsible and balanced usage. The major negative impacts identified in the literature are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Negative Impacts of Social Media

Impact Area	Recent Study	Key Findings
Mental Health Issues	Valkenburg <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Social media use was associated with increased risks of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents and young adults.
Social Media Addiction	Cheng <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Problematic social media use was linked to reduced self-control, psychological distress, and impaired daily functioning.
Cyberbullying and Online Harassment	Zhu <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Victims of cyberbullying reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, emotional distress, and social withdrawal.
Misinformation and Fake News	Wang <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Social media platforms accelerate the spread of misinformation, particularly during crises, health emergencies, and political events.
Privacy and Data Security Risks	Auxier <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Growing concerns were reported regarding data collection, surveillance, identity theft, and misuse of personal information.
Reduced Academic and Work Productivity	Rozgonjuk <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Excessive social media use negatively affected concentration, time management, and academic performance.
Sleep Disturbances	Scott <i>et al.</i> (2019); recent evidence supported similar findings	Frequent nighttime social media use was associated with poor sleep quality, sleep deprivation, and fatigue.

Social Isolation and Relationship Problems	Keles <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Excessive online engagement may reduce face-to-face interactions and contribute to loneliness and interpersonal conflicts.
Polarization and Echo Chambers	Cinelli <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Algorithm-driven content exposure can reinforce existing beliefs, contributing to ideological polarization and misinformation amplification.
Body Image and Self-Esteem Concerns	Saiphoo & Vahedi (2019); recent reviews (2024)	Exposure to idealized online images was associated with body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, particularly among young users.

Future Trends and Emerging Dimensions of Social Media

Social media is continuously evolving with advancements in artificial intelligence, immersive technologies, and digital commerce. Modern platforms are no longer limited to

communication and networking but have become integrated ecosystems supporting content creation, business, education, healthcare, governance, and entertainment. Recent literature highlights several emerging trends that are likely to shape the future of social media.

Table 5: Emerging Trends and Future Directions in Social Media

Emerging Trend	Recent Evidence and Key Findings
Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration	Dwivedi <i>et al.</i> (2021) identified AI-driven content recommendations, chatbots, automated moderation, and generative AI as major drivers of future social media development.
Personalization and Recommendation Systems	Appel <i>et al.</i> (2020) reported that algorithmic personalization increasingly determines content visibility, user engagement, and consumer behavior.
Creator Economy and Monetization	Kapoor <i>et al.</i> (2022) highlighted the rapid growth of creator economies, enabling users to generate income through content creation, subscriptions, sponsorships, and brand partnerships.
Social Commerce	DataReportal (2025) reported that a substantial proportion of users discover brands and products through social media, making platforms important digital marketplaces.
Short-Form Video Content	Recent studies indicate that platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts dominate user engagement due to their accessibility and entertainment value.
Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR)	Research suggests that immersive technologies will enhance user experiences through virtual interactions, digital events, and metaverse-based environments.
Digital Well-being and Responsible Use	Growing concerns regarding mental health, privacy, and misinformation have increased emphasis on digital literacy, ethical platform design, and responsible social media use.
Privacy and Data Protection	Emerging regulations worldwide are encouraging greater transparency, user control over data, and stronger privacy protections.

Implications of Social Media

Implications refer to the practical significance, consequences, or outcomes that arise from the use of social media and their influence on individuals, institutions, and society. Understanding these implications helps identify opportunities for maximizing the benefits of social media while addressing the challenges associated with its use. While the positive and negative impacts of social media have been widely documented, examining their broader implications is equally important. Such an analysis provides insights into the actions and strategies required by various stakeholders to promote responsible, ethical, and effective use of social media across different sectors.

- **Implications for Individuals:** Social media enhances communication, self-expression, and access to information. However, concerns related to misinformation, privacy breaches, cyberbullying, and excessive usage highlight the need to strengthen digital literacy, critical thinking skills, and responsible online behavior. Promoting awareness regarding healthy social media practices can help users maximize benefits while minimizing potential harms.
- **Implications for Education:** Social media has expanded opportunities for collaborative learning, knowledge sharing, and access to educational resources. To fully utilize its educational potential, institutions need to integrate social media into learning environments while emphasizing information verification, ethical online conduct, and digital citizenship among students.
- **Implications for Business and Entrepreneurship:** Social media has transformed marketing, customer engagement, and brand communication. The growing

reliance on digital platforms underscores the need for ethical marketing practices, transparent communication, and robust data protection measures to maintain consumer trust and long-term sustainability.

- **Implications for Healthcare:** Social media has emerged as an important channel for health promotion, awareness campaigns, and dissemination of health information. However, the rapid spread of health-related misinformation necessitates greater efforts from healthcare professionals and institutions to promote evidence-based communication and improve public health literacy.
- **Implications for Agricultural and Rural Development:** Social media platforms facilitate timely dissemination of agricultural information, market intelligence, weather advisories, and government schemes. To improve their effectiveness, there is a need to strengthen digital infrastructure, enhance digital competencies among farmers, and promote locally relevant and language-specific content.
- **Implications for Governance and Policymaking:** Social media has increased opportunities for citizen participation, public communication, and civic engagement. At the same time, challenges related to misinformation, online harassment, and data privacy emphasize the need for comprehensive digital policies, stronger regulatory frameworks, platform accountability, and user protection mechanisms.

The evidence suggests that the future benefits of social media will depend not only on technological advancements but also on the ability of stakeholders to promote responsible usage, digital inclusion, ethical practices, and

effective governance. A balanced approach is essential to maximize the positive contributions of social media while minimizing its potential risks for individuals and society.

Conclusion

Social media has become a powerful force shaping communication, information exchange, education, business, healthcare, and social interactions in the digital era. This review highlights that social media offers significant benefits, including enhanced connectivity, collaborative learning, knowledge dissemination, civic participation, and economic opportunities. At the same time, concerns related to mental health issues, addiction, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy risks, and social polarization continue to pose important challenges. The review further demonstrates that emerging trends such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic personalization, creator economies, and social commerce are redefining the scope and influence of social media. The impact of social media is therefore multifaceted, with outcomes largely dependent on the manner and purpose of its use. To maximize its benefits while minimizing associated risks, there is a need for responsible user behavior, digital literacy, ethical platform governance, and effective policy interventions. Such efforts are essential for fostering a safe, inclusive, and sustainable digital environment.

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