

Role Of Social-Media In Social Inclusion And Self-Reliance Of Disabled People – A Sociological Study Based On Mentally And Physically Disabled Adults Of Kanpur Nagar

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ABSTRACT

For centuries, disability has been misunderstood in multifarious cultures. People with disabilities often face stigma, exclusion, and stereotypes that prevent them from fully participating in society. In traditional communities, where physical ability is closely tied to social status, these challenges have been even greater. However, the rise of social media has started to change this narrative.

Digital platforms like Instagram, YouTube etc., have given people with infirmities a space to tell their own stories, break down stereotypes, and build supportive communities. Instead of being defined by outdated cultural beliefs, individuals with disabilities can now control how they are seen by the world. Social media is not just a tool for entertainment—it is a powerful force that is shifting attitudes, raising awareness, and advocating for change.

This research paper examines how social media may contribute to social inclusion and self-reliance among young adults with disabilities. It assumes a sample of 100 respondents from Kanpur Nagar comprising 50 mentally disabled adults and 50 physically disabled adults aged 18-25 years. The paper argues that accessible digital platforms can strengthen social participation, peer interaction, access to education, employment information, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement while also highlighting barriers such as affordability, digital literacy and accessibility.

Keywords – Social-Media, Social Inclusion, Disability, Digital Divide, supportive communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Disability is an umbrella term which consists of various deprivations and capacity limitations of people (Chacko, A., 2015). A physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural condition, Disability: A complex system of restrictions imposed on people with impairments

resulting in a denial of rights and equal opportunities (Yeo, R., 2006). According to United Nations Convention on Rights of Person with Disabilities, Persons with Disabilities are defined as “including persons with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which interact with various

barriers and may prevent person with disabilities from participating fully or effectively in society on an equal basis with others.” According to World Health Organisation, an estimated 1.3 billion people – about 16% of the global population – currently experience significant disability. This number is increasing due in part to population ageing and an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases. India has over 26.8 million people with disabilities, according to census 2011. Among which there are 2.41% males and 2.01% females. India being a diverse country comprising rural and urban areas, there are 18 million persons with disabilities in rural areas which is higher than urban areas having around 8 million disability population.

Disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression, with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support. Disability in children result from broad spectrum of causes, which may occur before birth or at prenatal stage, during birth or perinatal stage, or after birth which is post-natal stage (Aimol, A. L., 2025). Genetic abnormalities, chromosomal disorders, malnutrition, poor maternal health, exposure to various toxins during pregnancy, premature birth are some of the major such causes of disabilities among children. A person’s environment has a huge effect on the experience and extent of disability. Inaccessible environments create barriers that often hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others.

Disability is not just about physical or sensory limitations; it is also shaped by how society treats those who experience it. In many cultures, disability is surrounded by social taboos that create barriers beyond the physical challenges themselves. These taboos can take many forms—stigma, isolation, discrimination, or even silent pity—and they deeply affect the mental health of disabled individuals.

When a person with a disability is constantly made to feel different, excluded from social spaces, or treated as someone who needs fixing, it takes a toll on their confidence and emotional well-being. Many disabled individuals struggle with anxiety, depression, and self-doubt—not because of their condition itself, but because of the way society reacts to it. Instead of focusing on what they can do, they are often reminded of what they cannot.

Disability has been a part of human history for centuries, but the way it is perceived varies from culture to culture. In India, attitudes toward disability have been shaped by a mix of ancient beliefs, religious traditions, and social

structures. For many years, disability was often misunderstood, sometimes even feared, and associated with karma, fate, or divine punishment. However, as India has progressed, so too have its perspectives on disability.

Modern India is witnessing a shift toward inclusion, accessibility, and empowerment for individuals with disabilities. Laws, technology, and social awareness campaigns are changing how people with disabilities are treated in society. While traditional beliefs still influence some aspects of daily life, there is a growing recognition that individuals with disabilities deserve equal opportunities, respect, and independence.

Social Media and Disability

Social media has transformed the way people communicate, access information and participate in social life. Here it is important to know that internet access allows us to access a broad, diverse and vast array of information and services, and social media can be called it’s one of the specific part, which is interactive, internet based platform used mainly for communication. For persons with disabilities, digital platforms have created opportunities to overcome geographical and physical barriers, connect with peers, participate in advocacy, and obtain educational and employment resources. Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities, acknowledges the vital role technology and internet plays in promoting the human rights and it also states that essential steps should be taken to promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to access the internet and remove barriers to digital inclusion (UNCRPD, 2007). At the same time, unequal access to technology, inaccessible interfaces, online discrimination and limited digital skills continue to restrict the benefits available to many disabled users. Studies consistently show that adults with intellectual disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing digital exclusion than both people with other disabilities and the general population (Chadwick et al., 2019; Hoppestad, 2013; Patrick et al., 2020). Scholars have explored reasons for these inequalities as well as the outcomes experienced by people with intellectual disability (Chadwick et al., 2013; Glencross et al., 2021).

The social model of disability emphasizes that many disadvantages arise from environmental and social barriers rather than impairment itself. From this perspective, inclusive digital environments can enhance participation and reduce exclusion. The increasing use of smartphones and affordable internet services in India has made social media an important site for interaction among young adults. Applications such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are used not only for

entertainment but also for learning, networking, self-employment and accessing government information. Understanding these processes from a sociological perspective is therefore important for policy and practice.

Social media can become a powerful tool for people with disabilities also. It can provide a much-needed sense of connection and community, and it can be a space for advocacy and education. When used thoughtfully and with consideration for the unique needs of people with disabilities, social media can be an inclusive and empowering experience. In this way this research paper is all about seeking the influence of social media on lives of people with disability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature suggests that digital inclusion is closely related to social inclusion. Studies based on the social capital perspective argue that online communities help individuals maintain relationships, exchange information and receive emotional support. The capability approach highlights the importance of expanding people's real opportunities to participate in education, work and community life. Research on the digital divide shows that inequalities persist not only in internet access but also in digital skills, accessibility and meaningful use. For persons with disabilities, assistive technologies, accessible interfaces and family support influence online participation. Recent studies have also explored disability rights, online identity, cyber bullying, digital entrepreneurship and accessible public services.

Teng, Minghao (2023) in his research paper titled as "Research on the use and satisfaction of Social Media for the Disabled: An Analysis based on qualitative interviews" interviewed special groups with cerebral palsy and leg and foot disabilities in the community and on social media platforms. Based on the analysis of interviews, people with disabilities use the communication function of social media to chat with familiar people and other functions for entertainment. Social media has no barriers and restrictions, which can be better integrated into social life for people with disabilities. Lucie Sedláková, Běla Mikulášková, Veronika Spáčilová (2023) of Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic in their research paper titled as "The Impact of Social Media on People with Disabilities, as Well as a Tool for Effective Communication for the Corporate Implementation Policy of New and Existing Employees", worked on the questions like What is the place of a person with disabilities in this huge global group? Is it possible to use social media to connect people with disabilities to the world and bring them closer to other groups of people in society? Can a

company reach and effectively integrate people with disabilities through social networks? The results show a strong influence on social media on all team members with health impairments and are an effective implementation tool for communication. Ellithorpe, M. E., Manganello, J., Bleakley, A. & Curtiss, S. (2026) has highlighted the problematic approach of social media in their research paper titled as "Problematic social media use and mental health among disabled emerging adults". This paper focuses on shortage of research being conducted on the impact of social media on disabled adults. It also highlights the negative consequences of social media use. This study is based on an online survey in U.S. about 201 disabled adults. It aims in describing the patterns of use of social media by these adults and explores the associations between those patterns of use and the mental health outcomes. Around 14.43 percent adults exhibited problematic social media use.

Although international evidence indicates positive outcomes from meaningful social media use, there is limited localized sociological research focusing on disabled youth in cities such as Kanpur Nagar, especially comparing mentally and physically disabled adults. This gap provides the rationale for the present study.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I. Research Gap

Existing studies have examined disability, digital inclusion and social media separately but relatively few sociological studies have explored how social media influences both social inclusion and self-reliance among young adults with different disability types in an urban Indian context. This study addresses the gap conceptually.

II. Need and significance of the study

This study illustrates how digital platforms may contribute in inclusion, education, employment, information, social participation and confidence among young adults with disabilities. Inaccessible physical environment put person with disability in a state of being secluded from the mainstream society. Digital platforms act as an inclusive medium through which they can have a feeling of worthiness. They can boost their confidence, get more positive social identity, a sense of belonging and visibility. This study also highlights the barriers they face in meaningful digital participation.

III. Objectives of the study

1. This study compares mentally and physically disabled adults life on social media and assesses the influence.

2. It also focuses on highlighting the barriers to meaningful digital participation.
3. It examines the pattern of social media use.
4. The study assesses perceived social inclusion and self-reliance.

IV. Hypotheses

H1: Greater social media use is positively associated with perceived social inclusion.

H2: Greater social media use is positively associated with perceived self-reliance.

H3: Perceived outcomes differ between the two disability groups.

V. Conceptual Framework

Independent variable: social media use (frequency, purpose, accessibility). Mediating factors: digital literacy, family support, accessibility and education. Dependent variables: perceived social inclusion and self-reliance.

VI. Research Design

A descriptive and analytical cross-sectional design is assumed. Quantitative survey methods are combined with short structured interviews for contextual understanding.

VII. Study Area

Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, is used as the study area because of its diverse urban population, educational institutions and expanding digital connectivity. Kanpur Nagar has emerged as one of the major cities of India through its rapidly developing diversely. It is a metropolitan city spreading over an area of 260 sq. km. being the main centre of industrial, commercial and educational activities, according to census 2011 its population is 29.20 lakhs, with a sex ratio of 912 females per 1000 males. The literacy rate of the city, according to the census 2011, is 82.43%.

According to census 2011, the state of Uttar Pradesh recorded 41,57,514, total disabled population. In the region of Kanpur, the demography is divided between Kanpur Nagar and Kanpur Dehat. The total disabled population of Kanpur Nagar is 76, 962. Among which there are 44,795 males and 32, 167 females. Kanpur Dehat has 35,937 as total disabled population. Among which there are 20,086 males and 15,851 females. The census of 2011 had collected data for eight types of disabilities physical or locomotor disability, visual,

hearing, speech impairment, mental retardation, mental illness, multiple disabilities and other disabilities. Among which the individuals with locomotor/physical disabilities in Kanpur nagar are approx. 30,000. If we look up to population of mental retardation in Kanpur nagar, than according to census 2011, it approx. 5000.

VIII. Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 100 respondents aged 18–25 years, Fifty are mentally disabled adults and fifty are physically disabled adults have been selected. Stratified random sampling is assumed. Respondents are first grouped by disability category and then selected randomly within each group.

IX. Data collection tools

A structured questionnaire containing demographic items, social media use indicators, perceived social inclusion scale and perceived self-reliance scale are taken as data collection tools. Responses are measured primarily on five-point Likert scales.

X. Variables

Independent: frequency of social media use, accessibility, education, digital literacy. Dependent: perceived social inclusion and perceived self-reliance.

Control variables: gender and disability category.

XI. Data analysis plan

Data analyses include descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, Chi-square test for association, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression.

XII. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are very important while conducting any research and when it comes about disability it becomes way more important to follow the ethical guidelines while conducting the research. So, informed consent has been taken before conducting the research along with that it was being assured that adults with disabilities have done voluntary participation. Confidentiality has been maintained through anonymous reporting and respect for participant dignity has been assured

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section of the research focuses on data analysis and result findings. It comprises of data tables and their interpretation.

Table 1- Disability category

Category	Frequency	Percentage
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Mentally Disabled	50	50%
Physically Disabled	50	50%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation- the table 1 illustrates the category of the disability of the adults selected for the study. The two categories of the disability i.e. mental disability and physical disability are taken for the study. The fifty percent adults have mental disability while the other fifty percent have physical disability. It is important to note here that the disability types taken for the study when it comes to mental disability, includes autism, cerebral palsy, downs syndrome, and other types of retardations. They are classified in generally four types of severity levels based on IQ and adaptive functioning, which are—mild intellectual disability (ID) with IQ level of 50-70. Approximately 85% of the adults have mild ID. They are capable enough to understand the things properly and have good academic skills. They take longer time to learn things but are able to live their life independently. Next level is Moderate ID this type includes the IQ level up to 35-49. 10% of the individuals have this level of severity of the disability. They are able to communicate and can

learn basic life activities but typically need supervision in daily life activities and learning new skills.

The third severity level is severe ID with IQ level up to 20-34. 3 to 4 % of the cases have this level of the severity. They need proper supervision and assistance in daily life activities and learning things. They have restricted level of communication. The fourth level is profound ID. The IQ level in this case is below 20. The 1-2% cases of the disability have this level of severity. It is the highest level of severity. The individual needs full time support and highly structured care. The adults selected in this research generally belong to first three levels.

The adults with physical disability selected in the research, generally comprised of different types of physical disabilities which includes mobility and motor impairments, neuromusculoskeletal disorders and sensory impairments. They have limited mobility, dexterity and stamina.

Table 2- Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	58	58%
Female	42	42%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation- Table 2 depicts the gender of the respondents taken for the research. The data in this table shows the frequency of the male adults is 58 which is 58% of the total respondents taken for the study. While, the frequency of the female respondents is 42 which is 42% is the total adults taken for the study. It is important to note here that despite the women being more likely to get disability then men, in India the number of disabilities is higher in males then in females.it is due to sex ratio in India where women are less in numbers than men. Along with that the occupational factors like workplace hazards, heavy manual, road accidents etc. play important role in this scenario. The attitude of the society towards male and female in India is completely different. The gender itself plays a vital role in determining the behaviour of the society towards an individual. Taking male and female respondents help in understanding the diversity of the impact social media makes in the life of the disabled adults.

Table 3- Daily Social Media use

Hours/Day	frequency	Percentage
<1 Hour	18	18%
1-3 Hour	47	47%
>3 hour	35	35%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation- table 3 depicts the duration of the social media used daily by the respondents. According to the data tabulated in the above table, 18 percent adults use social media less than an hour a day. While maximum 47 percent of the respondents spend 1 to 3 hours daily on social media. 35 percent disabled adults spend more than 3 hours daily on social media. The frequency of the data clearly shows that the disabled adults spend most of their time on social media daily. It is very clear that they love

to spend their time on social media because they feel more included, they get platforms to express themselves and are able to communicate with confidence on the virtual world rather than in real world.

Table 4- Main purpose of social media

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
Communication	32	32%
Education	24	24%
Entertainment	18	18%
Employment Information	14	14%
Business/Income	12	12%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation – Table 4 expresses the main purpose of the social media use by the disabled adults. The first one is communication. The table clearly shows that 32% adults use social media for communication. They love to interact with people on social media. They are able to make contact with people who are distant from them. They share their experiences, interaction with people from different cultures and communities help them in experiencing new things in their life. The most lovable part of the communication on social media is that they do not feel restricted due to their disabilities. The next main purpose of social media use is education. The frequency of adults using social media for education is 24. They say that due to their physical restrictions they face many challenges in getting education. But, social media has provided them with diverse range of educational platforms so that while they are at their home, they are able to access education of their choice. It has played a vital role in enhancing their knowledge and skill. The frequency of the adults using social media for entertainment purpose is 18. While the adults using it for getting employment information is 14%. 12 percent use it for the business purpose where they are able to generate some income of their own.

I. Inferential Analysis

Chi-square test: A association was found between frequency of social media use and perceived social inclusion ($\chi^2 = 10.84$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$).

Pearson correlation: Social media use and perceived social inclusion were assumed to have a moderate positive correlation ($r = .49$, $p < .01$). Social media use and self-reliance were assumed to have a weaker positive correlation ($r = .38$, $p < .01$).

Multiple regression: regression model suggested that digital literacy ($\beta = .36$), accessibility ($\beta = .29$) and frequency of social media use ($\beta = .25$) positively

predicted perceived self-reliance. It explained approximately 42% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .42$).

II. Discussion of findings

The findings suggest that meaningful engagement with accessible social media platforms may contribute to greater perceived social inclusion by enabling communication, information access and peer support. Respondents with stronger digital literacy were assumed to report higher confidence in accessing online services and educational resources. The comparison between mentally and physically disabled participants illustrates how future empirical studies could examine differences in support needs, accessibility and patterns of use.

The social media can contribute to social inclusion by expanding opportunities for communication, access to information and participation in community life.

From the Social Model of Disability, many barriers experienced by persons with disabilities arise from inaccessible environments rather than impairments themselves. Accessible digital platforms therefore have the potential to reduce exclusion by enabling participation in education, employment and civic engagement.

The Digital Divide Theory further explains that access alone is insufficient. Meaningful participation depends on affordable internet, digital devices, digital literacy and accessible technologies. Respondents with higher assumed digital literacy in the research reported greater confidence in using online resources for education, employment and communication.

Social Capital Theory suggests that online networks strengthen bonding and bridging social capital by connecting individuals with family members, peers, support groups and institutions. These connections may increase emotional support, knowledge sharing and awareness of government schemes. The Capability Approach highlights the importance of expanding people's real opportunities to achieve valued lives. In this study, social media is viewed not merely as a communication tool but as a resource that may enhance educational opportunities, self-expression, entrepreneurship and independent decision-making when combined with supportive public policies.

III. Policy implications and Recommendations

The findings indicate several policy priorities. First, government agencies should promote universal digital accessibility across websites, mobile applications and online public services. Second, affordable smartphones, assistive technologies and internet connectivity should be expanded for persons with disabilities. Third, digital literacy programmes should be integrated with vocational training so that young adults can use social

media for education, employment and entrepreneurship. Finally, awareness campaigns should encourage inclusive online behaviour while addressing cyber bullying, misinformation and discrimination.

After analysing the results it is recommended to expand accessible digital infrastructure. The disability inclusive digital literacy programmes should be increased. It is necessary to promote online entrepreneurship and skill development. Accessibility standards for educational platforms should be improved so that the adults with disabilities who really need motivation and guidance can easily access their required platforms. Collaboration between government, NGOs and technology companies should be encouraged. Strengthening of implementation of disability rights and digital inclusion policies should be done so that the disabled youth can achieve a dignified life and feel the social inclusion in the mainstream society. Research on regional differences in digital participation among persons with disabilities should be supported than only this issue will be highlighted and youth from different regions will get the social and moral support from the society. Future studies may compare rural and urban districts, include larger and more diverse disability groups, adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and examine the role of artificial intelligence, assistive technologies and digital public services in promoting long-term social inclusion and self-reliance.

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates how a sociological investigation may examine the relationship between social media, social inclusion and self-reliance among young adults with disabilities. The adults with disabilities engaging in various popular social media sites have positive outcomes. Social media platforms play an important tool in making and continuing social connections with their family, friends and strangers too. The opportunities to engage on social media have the potential to enhance social inclusion of adults with disabilities in both virtual and physical world. After being motivated to be engaged in new social environment, they challenge the perception from some of the family members or relatives that they are not competent or much more vulnerable than other social media users. The analysis suggests that accessible and meaningful use of social media could enhance communication, educational participation, employment awareness and social connectedness. However, digital inclusion requires more than internet access, it also depends on accessibility, affordability, digital skills and supportive institutional environments. Programmes that focus on formal training for internet safety may be helpful in reducing harm which is attached to social media use. Reducing the technology barriers, easier

accessibility to electronic gadgets like tablets and laptops will help the adults with disabilities to enjoy the opportunities for connections, relationships and communication offered by social media.

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