



## IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON CAREER DECISION-MAKING OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*This study examined the impact of social media usage on career decision-making among higher secondary students. Using a descriptive survey method, data were collected from 100 higher secondary students of Cuttack district, Odisha, India, through a self-developed questionnaire. The study analysed social media platform preferences, usage patterns, content consumption habits, and perceived benefits and challenges of using social media for career guidance. The findings indicate that 80% of students have access to smartphones, with YouTube being the most widely used platform (50%) for career-related content. A majority of students (64%) use social media to explore career options, and 72% report that it has expanded their awareness of new career opportunities. While social media is perceived as more influential than traditional sources like parents and teachers, students express only moderate confidence in the accuracy of online career information. The study further identifies key benefits—such as access to job information (37%) and immediate updates (25%)—alongside significant challenges, including exposure to misinformation (64%) and unreliable sources (24%). These findings underscore the need to integrate digital literacy and structured career counselling into the educational framework to empower adolescent students to make informed career decisions.*

**Keywords:** *Social media, career decision-making, higher secondary students, digital literacy, career guidance.*

### Introduction

The rapid proliferation of digital communication technologies has profoundly transformed the informational landscape in which adolescents navigate one of their most critical developmental milestones: career decision-making. Social media, broadly defined as internet-based platforms  
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facilitating content creation, sharing, and virtual interaction, has evolved from a tool for social communication into a complex ecosystem that actively shapes young people's perceptions, aspirations, and life choices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and TikTok now serve not only as entertainment channels but also as informal educational and career guidance resources, exposing students to a diverse range of professional pathways, success narratives, and industry insights.

India represents a particularly compelling context for this inquiry. With approximately 462 million social media users as of January 2024—representing 32.2% of the total population—and nearly 78% of urban adolescents aged 13 to 17 spending over one hour daily on digital platforms, the influence of social media on adolescent development is substantial (Basuroy, 2024; DataReportal, 2024). Higher secondary students, typically aged 15 to 18 years, stand at a pivotal juncture where choices concerning academic streams, college entrance examinations, and vocational directions carry long-term consequences for their professional trajectories.

Traditionally, career choices were shaped by a combination of parental guidance, teacher recommendations, peer influence, and personal interests and aptitudes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). However, the digital age has introduced a new layer of influence, wherein social media platforms act as informal career counsellors, providing adolescents with exposure to careers, role models, and information that extend well beyond conventional classroom and familial boundaries. Career-related content—ranging from motivational testimonials and vocational tutorials to internship advertisements and professional profiles—is now accessible instantaneously, democratising career information while simultaneously introducing risks of misinformation and unrealistic expectation.

Despite the growing pervasiveness of social media in adolescent life, empirical research specifically examining its influence on the career decision-making of higher secondary students in India remains limited. Most existing studies focus on university students or Western populations (Nguyen, 2024; Lee et al., 2018), leaving the critical career-exploration phase of younger students in the Indian context relatively underexplored. Furthermore, research focusing on the state of Odisha is almost entirely absent from the academic literature, creating a significant regional gap.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact of social media usage on career decision-making among higher secondary students of Cuttack district, Odisha. By examining patterns of social media use, the types of platforms and career content accessed, the degree of platform influence on career aspirations, and students' perceptions of the benefits and

challenges of online career guidance, this study seeks to generate empirically grounded insights that can inform educational policy and practice.

### **1. Review of Related Literature**

A growing body of research has examined the intersection of social media use and career development across various student populations. Agrawal and Jacob (2024) highlighted social media's emergence as an alternative information source for university students navigating academic and career decisions, underscoring its increasing salience alongside traditional guidance mechanisms.

Studies examining the qualitative dimensions of social media's career influence reveal a nuanced picture. Nguyen (2024), drawing on data from twelve Asian American students, found that social media could both broaden career possibilities and distort them through unrealistic portrayals, while also fostering community connections and inspirational role models. Similarly, Maoyu et al. (2023) demonstrated that career-oriented social media usage increases career anxiety but simultaneously promotes career exploration, particularly among students with a high social comparison orientation.

Research on secondary school students, though comparatively limited, indicates platform-specific dynamics. Ehindero et al. (2023) found no statistically significant relationship between social network usage and career guidance outcomes among secondary students in Ilorin, Nigeria, suggesting that the mere availability of social media does not guarantee effective career guidance. In contrast, David et al. (2021), studying higher secondary students in India, found that male students exhibited significantly higher levels of social media activity than female students, and that urban students used social media more than their rural counterparts. Dhanwal et al. (2022) reported a negative correlation between social media use and academic performance among secondary students in Haryana, raising concerns about the trade-offs involved.

The psychological dimensions of adolescent social media engagement have also received attention. Vogel et al. (2014) demonstrated that exposure to upward social comparisons on social media platforms lowered self-esteem, while Shannon et al. (2021) confirmed moderate but significant associations between problematic social media use and depression, anxiety, and stress in adolescents. These findings contextualise the career guidance function of social media within a broader landscape of psychological risk.

From a career guidance standpoint, Lee et al. (2018), in their study of hospitality management students, found that traditional factors such as parents, faculty, and mentors exerted greater

influence on career choices than social media, while acknowledging social media's supplementary role. Kholiq and Solehuddin (2020) reported that Facebook could serve as an effective medium for career counselling when guided by trained school counsellors, demonstrating the platform's potential when structured support is provided.

The evidence base thus points to a complex, dual-edged role for social media in adolescent career development: it can expand career awareness and access to information while also introducing misinformation, unrealistic expectations, and psychological risks. Research specifically addressing higher secondary students in the Indian state of Odisha is, to the best of the investigator's knowledge, absent from the literature, constituting the primary gap that this study seeks to fill.

## **2. Research Questions**

- How does social media contribute to students' awareness of different career options?
- How do different social media platforms influence the shaping of students' career aspirations?
- What are the perceived challenges and benefits of using social media for career decision-making among higher secondary students?

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

- To analyse the influence of social media on students' career awareness and choices.
- To explore the role of different social media platforms in shaping students' career aspirations.
- To identify the challenges and benefits of using social media for career decision-making among higher secondary students.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Design**

A descriptive survey method was employed in this study to examine the impact of social media usage on career decision-making among higher secondary students. This design was selected for its suitability in capturing attitudinal and behavioural patterns across a defined population at a single point in time.

### **4.2 Population and Sample**

The target population comprised all Higher Secondary students of Cuttack District, Odisha. Using a random sampling technique, a sample of 100 students was selected. The sample included 40 male (40%) and 60 female (60%) students, representing a cross-section of students from the Arts, Commerce, and Science streams.

### 4.3 Tool for Data Collection

A self-developed structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire comprised items examining: (a) access to smartphones and personal computers, (b) social media platform preferences, (c) daily duration of social media use, (d) types of content consumed, (e) use of social media for career exploration, (f) perceived influence of social media on career choices, (g) sources of career-related information, (h) confidence in the accuracy of social media career advice, (i) comparative perceptions of social media versus traditional career guidance sources, and (j) perceived benefits and challenges of using social media for career decision-making.

### 4.4 Findings of the Study

Based on the provided responses by the sample participants, the following findings emerged in the present study. Objective-wise major findings are given below.

**Objective 1:** To analyse the influence of social media on students' career awareness and choices.

- 80% of students had access to smartphones or personal computers, facilitating frequent use of social media for various purposes, including career exploration.
- A significant portion (64%) of students reported using social media to explore different career options.
- 72% of students believed that social media expanded their awareness of new career opportunities, particularly in the Arts stream (48%).
- Social media was reported as a more influential source of career information (40%) than traditional sources such as teachers (38%) and parents (6%).
- 80% of students (50% agree and 30% strongly agree) felt that social media provided better career guidance than traditional sources.

**Objective 2:** To explore the role of different social media platforms in shaping students' career aspirations

- YouTube (50%) was the most used platform for career-related content, followed by Instagram (14%) and Facebook (8%).
- 20% of students found social media "very influential," while 46% found it "somewhat influential" in shaping their career choices.
- Female students used social media for career guidance more frequently (34%) than male students (30%), indicating gender-based differences in digital career exploration.

- A majority (56%) of students expressed only “somewhat confident” trust in the accuracy of career advice found on social media, while 26% were not confident.

**Objective 3:** To identify the challenges and benefits of using social media on career decision-making among higher secondary students

**Perceived Benefits:**

- 37% of students used social media to find information about job vacancies.
- 25% appreciated the immediate updates regarding job opportunities.
- 14% used it for organizational knowledge, and 12% for career guidance and learning professional skills.

**Perceived Challenges:**

- 64% of students reported encountering wrong or misleading information while using social media for career guidance.
- 24% identified unreliable sources as a major challenge.
- 16% mentioned that relying on social media for career decisions was time-consuming.

**5. Discussion**

The findings of this study converge with and extend existing literature on social media and career development in several important ways. The dominance of YouTube as a career information platform (50%) aligns with global trends indicating video-based content as the preferred medium for informal learning and career exploration among adolescents (Sivakumar et al., 2023). The near-total absence of LinkedIn and Twitter use among the sample is notable and may reflect both the age of the cohort (approximately 15–16 years) and a broader pattern observed by Raza and Naseer (2021), who found that students with accounts on professional networking platforms often do not use them proactively for career development.

The finding that social media (40%) has surpassed parents and family (6%) as a career information source among this sample reflects a significant generational shift in information-seeking behaviour. This trajectory aligns with Agrawal and Jacob's (2024) observation that social media now constitutes an alternative—and for many students, primary—career information source. However, it also raises concerns about the quality and accuracy of information students receive, particularly given that 56% of students express only moderate confidence in the reliability of social media career advice and 26% express low confidence. Students are thus navigating a paradox: they increasingly rely on social media for career guidance, yet remain uncertain about its accuracy.

The predominance of misinformation (64%) as the most cited challenge resonates with Nguyen's (2024) finding that social media can distort career perceptions through unrealistic portrayals. This is particularly significant in the Indian context, where career choices are often mediated by socioeconomic constraints and where misinformation about high-status or glamorised careers could have consequential effects on students' academic and vocational trajectories. The finding that 80% of students (combined 'agree' and 'strongly agree') believe social media offers better career guidance than traditional sources—despite simultaneously expressing doubts about its accuracy—suggests a form of epistemic tension that warrants attention from educators and counsellors.

The gender-based patterns observed in this study are also noteworthy. Female students exhibited higher social media use in terms of social interaction, while male students showed a greater tendency to engage with career guidance content. Despite this, female students were equally or more active in exploring career options through social media, and used it more frequently as a career information source. These patterns suggest that gender dynamics in social media-based career exploration are complex and do not follow a simple linear trajectory, meriting further investigation through qualitative methodologies.

The present study is limited by its relatively small sample size ( $n = 100$ ) which limits the generalisability of findings. Future research should employ larger, more geographically diverse samples, incorporate qualitative methodologies to capture students' lived experiences in greater depth, and examine the longitudinal relationship between social media-based career exploration and actual career outcomes. Intervention studies testing the efficacy of digital literacy programmes in improving the quality of students' career decisions would also constitute a valuable contribution to this emerging field.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides empirical evidence that social media has become a significant—and in many cases primary—source of career information and inspiration for higher secondary students in Cuttack, Odisha. YouTube leads as the preferred platform for career-related content, and a substantial majority of students report that social media has expanded their career awareness. Social media's influence on career choices is widely acknowledged, though students express only moderate confidence in the accuracy of online career advice.

The benefits of social media—access to job information, immediate updates, organisational knowledge, and exposure to professional skills—are accompanied by important risks, most notably the prevalence of misinformation and unreliable sources. The study underscores a

critical paradox: students are increasingly dependent on social media for career guidance even as they remain uncertain about its reliability. This gap calls for urgent educational intervention. These findings carry important implications for educators, parents, and policymakers. The integration of social media literacy and critical digital thinking into school curricula is essential to equip students with the skills needed to navigate online career information responsibly. Career counsellors should leverage the platforms students are already using—particularly YouTube—to deliver credible, structured career guidance. Parents are encouraged to maintain dialogue with their children about their online activities and to complement digital exploration with offline career counselling. Policymakers should consider developing targeted digital career guidance programmes that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of adolescent users.

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