



The Impact of Social Media on Himalayan Culture of Shimla Hills and Surrounding Areas

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the evolving relationship between social media and traditional culture in Shimla Hills and adjoining areas of Himachal Pradesh including Solan, Sirmour, Mandi, and Kinnaur. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become a part of daily life even in remote villages and are especially popular among young people. These platforms are influencing the ways festivals are celebrated, folk stories and local dialects are shared, and cultural identities are expressed. This study explores both the benefits and drawbacks of this shift. On the positive side, social media is helping to preserve local traditions and support small businesses. On the downside, it can also lead to the loss of cultural values and create gaps between different groups in society. Using both surveys and interviews, the study collects views from people of different backgrounds to understand how deeply social media is shaping local culture. The findings may help cultural groups, communities, and policymakers take steps to protect and promote this rich cultural heritage in the digital age.

Keywords: Social Media, Himalayan Culture, Shimla Hills, Himachal Pradesh, Local Traditions, Folk Culture, Dialects, Cultural Identity, Youth and media, Digital Influence, Traditional Practices.

Introduction

The world has changed dramatically in the past few decades, especially with the rise of digital technology. Marshall McLuhan's concept of the "global village" has become a reality, where people across continents are connected in real-time through the internet. Social media, in particular, has revolutionized the way individuals communicate, share ideas, and represent their identities.

In the Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh especially in the Shimla Hills and the neighboring districts of Solan, Sirmour, Mandi, and Kinnaur social media has begun to reshape the fabric of traditional culture. From how festivals are celebrated, to how youth engage with their heritage, to how local languages are spoken and preserved, digital platforms have brought both opportunities and challenges. This research aims to examine how social media is influencing the culture of this region and to understand the broader implications for community identity, traditional practices, and social values.

The term "media" encompasses all channels of mass communication print, electronic, and digital. Traditionally, media was meant to inform and educate. Over time, its role has expanded to include shaping public opinion, cultural representation, and political awareness. In democratic societies, media is often seen as the "fourth pillar," reflecting and influencing the workings of the state and civil society.

The contemporary communication across the globe has hopped on to technology and especially to new media like never before with the soaring use social media, smart phones, skype, text messaging, computer mediated communication, virtual worlds and multi-player on line games. This has revolutionized the ways communicators interact across cultures and as a result challenging the traditional theories of face-to-face paradigm.

Evolution of Media and Its Entry into Himalayan Life

The development of media can be seen in four major stages:

1. **Traditional Oral Media:**
2. In the past, communication in Himachal's hills was primarily oral through folklore, rituals, religious discourses, and community announcements. This preserved local dialects like Himachali Pahari dialects i.e Mandiali, kangari, Kulvi, Mhasuvi, Kyunthli, Bhagati, khluri, Kinnauri, Bhotti, Chambyali, Pangvali etc.

3. **Print Media:** With the advent of printing in the 19th and 20th centuries, newspapers and religious texts became popular. Local people gained access to regional and national news, but media consumption remained limited.
4. **Electronic Media:** The introduction of radio and later television in rural Himachal broadened to entertainment and news. Programs in Hindi and local dialects helped people feel connected, but often pushed aside traditional forms of storytelling and knowledge sharing.
5. **Digital and Social Media:**

The new media are communication technologies that enable or facilitate user to user interactivity between user and information such as internet replaces “one to many” model of traditional mass communication with the possibility of a “many to many” web of communication, images, text and sound from the core of new media. So the new media with technology convergence shifts the model of mass communication and radically shapes the way we interact and communicate with one another.

Today, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube are increasingly used even in remote villages. Mobile phones have become household staples, connecting users across age and class boundaries.

Social Media Use in the Shimla Hills

Today the whole world is in the grip of information and communication technology, which has maximized the scope of exchanging the ideas with rest of the world. Modern Technology has turned the entire world in to a “Global village”. But it came with its negative and positive sides. Social media has reduced the entire world into a village. We can interact with the entire world with a single click. The same is applicable on the youth. Youth can exchange their ideas and information with the world and also can get the ideas and information from the world to get more opportunities of job, business, study, earning from home, etc. Social media give the opportunity to the youth to make new friends. It also helps them to maintain the old friendships.

Social media is being used in the Himalayan region in various innovative and impactful ways:

Cultural Promotion: Local festivals like Mahasu Jatar, Bhunda Mahayaga, Thoda in Theog, Shillaru, Bishu mela, Sirmour, Kullu Dussehra, and Shivratri in Mandi, minger mela in Chamba, marriage songs, Shivratri songs (Anchari) and many more rituals are now live-streamed or shared on Instagram and YouTube. Folk songs, traditional phari dance, and traditional dress, jewellery, traditional Food are promoted by young influencers and cultural activists.

Community Engagement: Villages use WhatsApp groups to share important community updates be it about health camps, Traditional fairs, temple festivals, rituals or panchayat decisions.

Tourism and Business: Local homestay owners, guides, and craftsmen use Facebook pages and Instagram reels to attract tourists and promote products like handwoven shawls or organic apples.

Education and Awareness: Environmental awareness, road safety, gender equality, and anti-drug campaigns are run on social platforms, especially targeting the youth.

Advantages of Social Media in Cultural Context

Bridging the Gap: Remote villages are now virtually connected with urban communities and even international audiences. This enables locals to share their culture with the world.

Digital Preservation: Oral traditions and vanishing dialects are being recorded and uploaded. For example, Pahari songs are being shared widely on YouTube.

Youth Involvement: Social media has provided younger generations with a new way to connect with their roots. Instead of rejecting old customs, many are reinterpreting them in modern forms—through photography, podcasts, and short videos.

Economic Benefits: Women entrepreneurs with self help groups and local artisans are using social platforms to sell products and tell their stories.

This not only supports livelihoods but also strengthens cultural identity.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite these advantages, several issues persist:

Digital Divide: Many rural areas still suffer from poor connectivity and lack of digital skills, leaving older generations or marginalized groups behind.

Misinformation: Fake news and misrepresentation of culture can spread quickly. Some cultural symbols may be misunderstood or misused online.

Cultural Erosion: Over exposure to global content can lead to the decline of local traditions. Youth may favor Western fashion or Bollywood over traditional Pahari dress and customs.

Short Attention Span: The fast pace of social media makes it difficult to sustain engagement with deep cultural knowledge.

Cultural Appropriation: Non-local content creators may use traditional dress or festivals for entertainment, stripping them of their original meaning and sanctity.

Impact on Culture and Society Positive Impacts

Revival of Traditions: Many cultural activities have found new life through digital platforms. For example folk music, folklore, has found an audience among younger people thanks to YouTube and Instagram reels.

Empowerment: Women, rural folk and tribal groups are using social media to express their cultural narratives and demand social justice.

Identity Formation: Youth are redefined by blending modern lifestyles with pride in traditional values.

Use of Local Language: Platforms like Facebook and YouTube are increasingly hosting content in local dialects, helping preserve them for future generations.

Negative Impacts

Homogenization of Culture: There's a danger of all regional cultures becoming similar, influenced by Bollywood or Western content.

Distraction and Addiction: Excessive use of mobile phones leads to reduced family interaction and traditional social bonding.

Mental Health and Social Isolation: Online bullying, comparison, and pressure to perform online can negatively affect young people's mental health.

Profile of Study Areas

"The highest mountain range in the world is much more than the physical mass that most of the world recognizes. Stretching in an immense arc of 2500 kms in length, along the boundaries and covering parts of 5 Asian countries, the rugged terrain of the Himalaya range is broken intermittently by valleys that have allowed habitation. Although a tremendously difficult terrain, the Himalayas are thus inhabited by a sizeable population of 65.57 million belonging to different indigenous tribes. Of this, 36.32 million reside in India (25% in Western Himalayas, 54% in Central Himalayas and 21% in Eastern Himalayas), 27.07 million in Nepal and 2.18 million in Bhutan.

The Himalayas are not only a conglomeration of series of snow laden mountain ranges, lush green valleys, beautiful lakes and rivers but also a sacred land of wisdom and learning of ancient Indian art, culture and philosophy. Since time immemorial the Himalayas have been known as the "Abode of God". The Vedas, The Epics, The Puranas and the Shastra not to mention the later literary work and inscriptions, not only speak about the glory of the Himalayan ranges but also mention the physical features of the region, the inhabitants and their age old socio economic and cultural traditions".

Profile of Shimla Hills

Himachal Pradesh is known as 'Devbhoomi Himachal Pradesh' meaning 'Land of Gods and Goddesses'. Situated in the lap of the King of Mountains, Himalayas, endowed with high peaks, lush green forests, green meadows, sparkling rivers, wide valleys, enchanting lakes and eternal snow, Himachal Pradesh is one of the most beautiful states of India, whose natural beauty exists from the Shivalik mountain range to the Greater Himalayas.

As soon as you step on Devbhoomi Himachal, these lines come to the tongue 'Unique creation of God', 'Unique gift of nature'- how enchanting, how pleasant. Many mythological legends merge with the picturesque beauty and extraordinariness of the magnificent mountains here. Green meadows, rugged rocks, roaring rivers, shady valleys, thrilling peaks, glaciers and huge deodars, ethnic culture, mythological rituals, exquisite flora and fauna compose the symphony that is Himachal forever. This sacred land of snow-clad meadows, singing streams has more than thousand temples and almost every village has a temple of community deity or local deities. A cluster of Buddhist monasteries and gompas are also found here which are spread across the vivid landscape.

Culture of Shimla Hills

The culture and folk literature of Himachal Pradesh is very broad in nature. Every feeling and sentiment of folk life is described in it. The geography of Himachal is divided into mountainous and plain, i.e. tribal and plain life. Hence, the folk literature of Lahaul, Spiti, Pangi, Kinnaur etc. regions is influenced by Tibetan Lama religion. Due to the same influence, the folk songs, stories, dramas, sagas differ from plains of Himachal, which is curious in its form. In short, the folk literature of Himachal is divided into three parts. The form is traditional in many forms and many styles. The principle of unity in diversity is alive and reflected in the literature of Himachal Pradesh. This quality gives Himachal a rich culture and tradition.

Today, when modernity and liberalization are at their peak all around and everyone in the society is moving towards openness, Himachali folk literature, culture and other arts are preserving their mythological and glorious past. Most of the citizens of this beautiful state are proud of their folk lifestyle and its past and in some way or the other everyone is moving forward by handling this heritage.

In every village, group of villages there is a presiding deity worshipped by everyone. Every year festivals are held in honour of the village God, Devtas, which is not only attended by the people of near by villages, but the God Devtas of other villages even. In these “maylas” or “bishues” festivals the experience is exquisite and the people rejoice by singing and dancing and playing the game of archery (Thoda) in honour of the presiding deity. Devotees trek many kilometers crossing the ravines, rivers and snow peaks to pay obeisance to their tutelary deity. These festivals act like an elixir to the people of the region who have to struggle under difficult environmental conditions and inclement weather conditions to make their ends meet.

The state is rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage which needs to be documented and preserved by disseminating it properly. There are efforts on the part of governmental and non-governmental organizations to revive the age old traditions but for this concerted efforts at the grass root level are required. The heritage is immense and this journey to restore this pride it will require initial beginning which could be under taken provided the enthusiasm is generated among the villagers.

More than 70% of Indian populations are rural inhabiting the villages. The word ‘Culture’ derived from a French term, that has been originated from the Latin-that suggests nursing the planet and rising or cultivation and nature. Culture is that which has the characteristics and information of particular group of people their Culture also includes their way of living, fair, festivals, food, jewellery, dress, general behaviour, language, religion, art, music and social habits.

The term ‘culture’ refers to the range of information, folklore, language, rules, rituals, habit, attitudes, beliefs, lifestyle and customs and provides a standard identity to a selected group of individuals at a particular point in time.

The culture consists of two types of elements, namely the non- objects and objects. Non objects Culture refers to the value, symbols, language and beliefs that outline a society and object learning involves the society’s physical objects like its tools & technology and mode of transportation.

All culture filled with symbols that stand for something else and reacts different response and feeling. The most vital part of the symbols is language. Language is essential to communication and so to any society’s culture. Kids learn language from their culture and like to learn different symbols. Almost all cultures have different rituals or traditional customs or ceremonies that frequently take change over in the course of life. The rituals project and spread the culture’s customs and other elements from generation to generation and the rituals play a vital role indifferent types of communities to spot changes in life and to carry the norms of culture to next generation.

Another crucial element of culture is values, which engage in the judgment of what is right or wrong and wanted or unwanted. The main difference between the traditional societies and the modern world are the valuable resource and its association towards it.

The cultures in the societies are always in the process of changing, which happens slowly in some societies and at rapid spread in few other cultures. The change is because of the modernism or the spread of ideas or behaviors from one culture to another.

The North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is a state that has remained largely uninfluenced by Western culture. Himachal was one of the few states that had remained largely untouched by external customs, largely due to its difficult terrain. With the technological advancements the state has changed very rapidly. It is a multi-religious, multi-cultural as well as multi-lingual state like other Indian states. Some of the most commonly spoken languages and dialects includes Hindi, Pahari, Mhasuvi, Mandeali, Kangri, Chambyali, Kulluvi and Kinnauri, etc.

The state is well known for its handicrafts. The carpets, leather works, shawls, rumal, metalware, woodwork and paintings are worth appreciating. Pashmina shawls are a product that is highly in demand in Himachal and all over the country. Himachali caps are famous art work of the people. Extreme cold winters of Himachal necessitated wool weaving. Nearly every household in Himachal owns a pit-loom. Wool is considered as pure and is used as a ritual cloth. The well-known woven object is the shawl in woolen and pashmina.

Kullu is famous for its shawls with striking patterns and vibrant colours and Bhutia brand of shawls, caps and mufflers is very good and famous in Himachal. Kangra and Dharamshala are famous for Kangra miniature paintings and seat of Tibetan head Dalai Lama at Dharamshala.

Local music and dance reflect the cultural identity of the state. Through their dance and music, they entreat their gods during local festivals and other special occasions. Apart from the fairs and festivals that are celebrated all over India, there are number of other fairs of national, international or state level categories and festivals that are of great significance in Himachal Pradesh.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of the current study is based on the fact situations and grounds related to the topic. It included various secondary sources such as books, newspapers, journals, e-material, specially Himachali Culture related material on social media, etc. It is an empirical study in which information will be obtained through interviews, questionnaire, survey and online, offline official modes. The required information, opinions, facts collected there by from various sections of society like Youth and remaining general public as per devised sample. An honest effort has to be put in collecting, analyzing data for concluding the results of the present study.

Research Design

There are different research techniques that can be used to conduct research studies. All these methods have theory of knowledge and the foundations of philosophy. With the help of a questionnaires, survey method is applied to interview general public i.e (Youth, Men, Women) of Shimla Hills and Surrounding Areas. The qualitative and quantitative methods are used to collect the data. A mixed method design is also been employed to determine

whether social media has an impact on Himalayan Culture of Shimla Hills and Surrounding areas. An honest effort will be made in collecting, analyzing data for concluding the results of the present study.

Sample Design

The sample size consists of all survey elements and audiences that qualify for inclusion in the research study. Culture has many definitions but usually consists of original and indigenous values, rites and material items associated with a particular group of people their peculiar customs, festivals, beliefs, dress and jewellery, food and cuisines. For this study, the research scholar will utilize qualitative and quantitative methods to collect the data. The research tool used in this study is questionnaires which has been developed on the bases of the objectives formulated for this study and interviews of experts on the subject.

The different questionnaires will be prepared for different sample audiences consist of some related relevant questions. The opinion in questionnaire will be related to time spent on social media, its usage and its implication on the traditional values, cultural practices, cultural identity, rituals, dress and jewellery, food, dialects, reality and myth of belief system, belief system in local deities, social changes through social media on study area.

Our definition of "surrounding areas" is areas with similarity in geography and culture. So we are including some of the areas of district Sirmour, Mandi, Solan and Kinnaur also for this study on the basis of many similarities in culture.

Design: Mixed-method combining surveys (300 respondents) and interviews.

Tools: Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and content analysis of social media posts.

Analysis: Quantitative data analyzed using percentages and frequency distribution; qualitative data thematically coded.

Data Collection Tools Primary and secondary data collection methods are used for the purpose of this study. The primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires, interviews, surveys, case studies, telephonic interviews and digital methods etc.

Primary Data

- Interviews with eminent experts on the subject.
- Questionnaire or Survey
- Observations

Secondary Data

Documents and Records of historical facts and case studies.

Newspapers, magazines, editorials, debates, earlier research work, news articles/journals/ books and related data available on Social Media.

Different Archives, Libraries and various Government/Non-Government Departments libraries of Himachal Pradesh Government.

Significance of the Study

This research will give a thorough understanding as how social media interacts with traditional cultures in the Shimla Hills. The findings will help policymakers, cultural organizations, and community leaders develop strategies to strike a balance between modernization and cultural preservation.

Need for Study

The study can provide a comprehensive documentation of the region's cultural practices, dialects, customs and traditions. It's finding can inform policies aimed at preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable tourism in the regions. The study can also explore how changing lifestyles and technological advancement are impacting traditional cultural practices.

Limitations of the Study

However in this study, we developed a research base doing prior research to Investigate the impact of social media on Himalayan Culture of Shimla Hills and Surrounding Areas.

Nevertheless limitations are the possible shortcoming or influences that either cannot be controlled or it is the result of the delimitations imposed by the investigator. There are several limitation evident in this study.

The research has only focused on the people of Shimla Hills and Surrounding Areas, whereas effect of social media is universal.

The study has included the youth of Shimla Hills and Surrounding Areas in its sample. As a matter of fact the youth are more proven and Influenced by social media sensitization.

Aims

To explore the impact of social media on the cultural dynamics of the Shimla hills and the surrounding Himalayan region. The researcher aims to examine influence of social media on cultural practices like traditional festivals, dialects, cultural heritage and folk traditions.

Objectives

- To examine the Impact of Social Media on Cultural Practices, Dialects and Traditional Values of the Himalayan regions in Shimla Hills and surrounding areas.
- To Investigate how platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter influence preservation of cultural practices and local traditions in Shimla Hills and surrounding Himalayan areas.
- To analyse how social media has helped to reinforce, or evolve the cultural identity of people including younger generations in the area of study.
- To Study how social media platforms influence language use and communication styles like local dialects and literary works.

Hypothesis

Social media has become a double-edged tool in Shimla Hills and surrounding areas, simultaneously preserving cultural elements by providing new platforms for visibility while also threatening traditional practices through homogenization and detachment from community-based experiences.

Findings

Survey Results: Usage and Cultural Participation

The survey explored daily social media usage, cultural participation, dialect preference, and trust in social media across age groups.

Table 1: Survey Data on Social Media Use and Cultural Trends in Shimla Hills

| Age Group | Daily Social Media Use (hrs) | Festival Participation (%) | Preference for Local Dialects (%) | Trust in Social Media for Cultural Info (%) |
|-----------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 15–24 | 4.5 | 55 | 40 | 70 |
| 25–34 | 3.8 | 65 | 48 | 65 |
| 35–44 | 2.5 | 72 | 55 | 55 |
| 45–60 | 1.5 | 80 | 70 | 45 |
| 60+ | 0.8 | 85 | 78 | 30 |

Interpretation:

- Younger respondents (15–24) spend the most time on social media (4.5 hrs daily) but show the lowest festival participation (55%).
- Elders (60+) spend less than an hour daily online yet have the highest cultural participation (85%) and strongest dialect loyalty (78%).
- Trust in social media declines sharply with age—from 70% in youth to 30% in elders.

Chart 1: Social Media Use vs Festival Participation

Interpretation:

This chart shows an inverse relationship: as age increases, social media usage decreases but festival participation rises. This suggests that younger groups are drifting towards digital spaces while elders remain rooted in physical cultural practices.

Social Media Use vs Festival Participation across Age Groups (Shimla Hills)

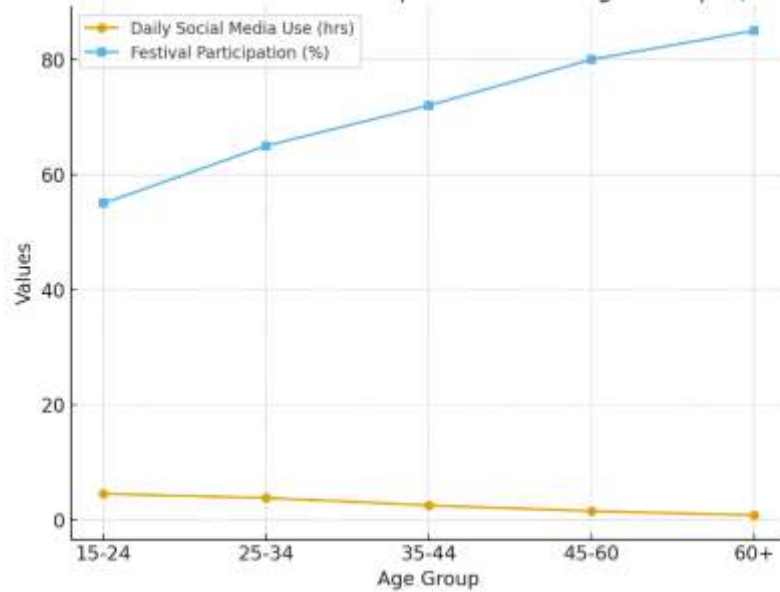
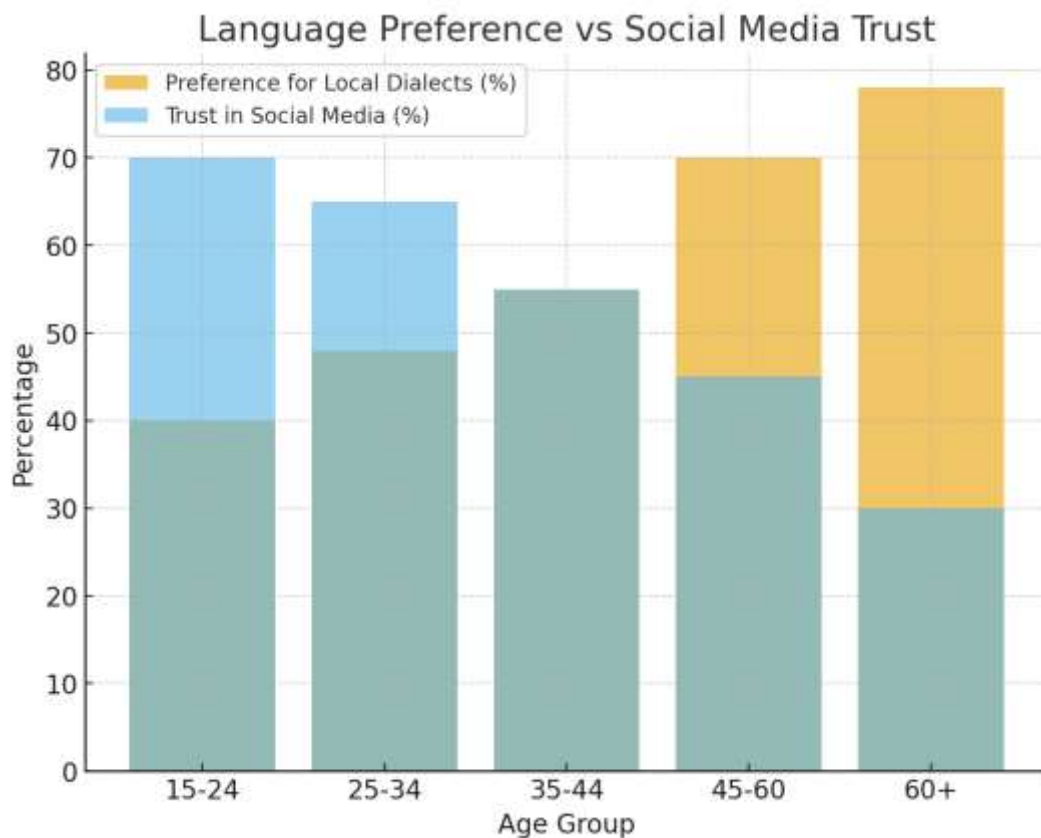


Chart 2: Language Preference vs Social Media Trust

Interpretation:

The second chart highlights a cultural tension. Younger groups trust social media as a source of cultural information but show weaker attachment to local dialects. In contrast, elders strongly prefer dialects and remain sceptical about online platforms.

**Discussion**

The data reveals a generational divide in how culture is experienced:

- **Youth** treat social media as both entertainment and cultural reference but risk superficial engagement.

- **Elders** remain the carriers of authentic tradition but are digitally excluded.
- **Middle-aged groups** (35–44, 45–60) represent a transitional stage, balancing digital exposure with community rituals.

These patterns confirm McLuhan's "global village" thesis while also echoing modernization theory: traditional practices are not disappearing but are being reshaped and hybridized through digital networks.

Conclusion

Social media has become a powerful force in shaping the cultural life of communities in Shimla Hills and the surrounding areas. While it offers unique opportunities to preserve, promote, and modernize traditions, it also presents serious challenges especially when it comes to maintaining authenticity, avoiding cultural exploitation, and ensuring digital access for all.

Social media in Shimla Hills acts as both a cultural preserver (by documenting and showcasing local traditions) and a cultural disruptor (by reducing physical participation and diluting meanings). Policymakers and cultural activists must adopt a dual strategy:

1. Encourage authentic cultural content online (folk music, dialect storytelling, festival livestreams etc.).
2. Strengthen local participation through education, awareness, and community events that integrate digital tools without replacing tradition.

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