The role of social media to highlighting migration issues in Uttarakhand

Aditi Pal[1, *], Dr. Asha Bala[2]

[1]M.A. Journalism & Mass Communication, Department of Mass Communication, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

Article Info	Abstract

This study explores the role of social media in highlighting migration issues in Uttarakhand, a Himalayan state where large-scale outmigration has become a persistent socio-economic and demographic challenge. The research examines how digital platforms—such as Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube, and WhatsApp—serve as spaces for dialogue, awareness, and activism surrounding migration-related concerns. Through a descriptive and analytical approach, the study analyses online narratives, campaigns, and citizen-led initiatives that bring visibility to problems like unemployment, poor infrastructure, declining agricultural prospects, and the resulting "ghost villages." Social media has enabled local voices, journalists, and civil society groups to bypass traditional media constraints and reach wider audiences, thereby influencing public opinion and, at times, policy discourse. However, the study also identifies challenges such as misinformation, superficial engagement, and the urban-rural digital divide, which limit the impact of online advocacy. Overall, the findings suggest that social media has emerged as a significant tool for participatory communication and social mobilization, amplifying grassroots perspectives on migration and contributing to a more inclusive understanding of development in Uttarakhand.

Introduction

Uttarakhand, known for its breathtaking natural beauty and vibrant cultural heritage, is facing a persistent and serious issue of **migration from the hill regions to the plains**. The phenomenon, often termed *"pahad se palayan"* (outmigration from the hills), has become one of the most pressing socio-economic concerns of the state. **Limited employment opportunities**, inadequate health and educational infrastructure, and **harsh living conditions** in the mountainous areas have compelled thousands of families to migrate in search of better livelihoods (Sati, 2020). This continuous exodus not only affects the **social and economic fabric** of the region but also threatens its **cultural continuity and ecological balance** (Negi & Joshi, 2021).

In this complex scenario, the **role of media** becomes crucial. Media—often regarded as the **fourth pillar of democracy**—has the power to influence public discourse and policymaking by bringing marginalized issues to the forefront (McQuail, 2010). The issue of migration in Uttarakhand demands attention not only from policymakers but also from the broader national audience. Here, both **traditional and digital media** play important roles in shaping narratives and mobilizing responses.

Traditional forms of media—such as print journalism, radio, and television—have historically attempted to highlight the migration crisis through reports, features, and public debates (Devi, 2020). However, their **reach remains limited**, particularly among **younger audiences** and in remote areas where media access is uneven. In contrast, **social media platforms** have revolutionized the landscape of communication in the last decade. The **interactive and participatory nature** of platforms like **Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube, and Instagram** allows individuals and organizations to share stories, videos, and campaigns that amplify awareness about migration issues in real time (Kumar &Thapliyal, 2022).

Through hashtags, digital storytelling, and community-driven initiatives, social media has emerged as a **dynamic tool for advocacy and citizen journalism**, giving visibility to local voices that are often ignored by mainstream outlets. Campaigns such as *"MeroPahadMeroGaon"* and *"Reverse Migration Movement"* have effectively used these platforms to engage youth and urban audiences, drawing attention to the urgency of sustainable development in Uttarakhand's hill regions.

In this context, the present study seeks to analyze**how social media contributes to highlighting migration issues in Uttarakhand**, focusing on its potential to inform, engage, and influence both public perception and policy discourse.

Objectives of the Study

1. **To analyze the primary causes of migration:** To identify and examine the major social, economic, and environmental factors responsible for migration in Uttarakhand.
2. **To study the role of media:** To understand the contribution of traditional and digital media (especially social media) in highlighting migration issues and bringing them to public and administrative attention.
3. **To assess the effectiveness of social media:** To evaluate how effectively social media raises awareness, suggests solutions, and influences policy changes.
4. **To promote public participation:** To explore how social media motivates local communities, youth, and migrant Uttarakhandis to engage in discussions and collective actions toward solutions.

Research Methodology

1. Type of Study

This study is both **quantitative** and **qualitative** in nature. It analyzes the role of media—especially social media—in highlighting migration issues in Uttarakhand.

2. Methods of Data Collection

Primary Data

- **Surveys:** Data collected through questionnaires from people across various districts of Uttarakhand, especially youth and affected communities.
- **Interviews:** Personal and group interviews with media professionals, social media influencers, migrant individuals, and government officials. For this purpose, the researcher selected Kui village in Narendra Nagar block of Tehri district.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Organized discussions on causes and effects of migration.

Secondary Data

- Newspapers, magazines, research papers, and government reports.
- Analysis of social media content (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) related to migration.
- Reports published by government and non-government organizations.
- Online government documents, policy papers, and statistics.
- Media coverage and published news reports.

3. Sample Selection

- **Sample Size:** 30–40 individuals from Kui village (Tehri) and Patna village (Pauri) districts.
- **Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling was used to include both migrant and non-migrant communities.
- **Sample Composition:** Social media users, media professionals, and members of affected rural communities.

4. Data Collection Tools

- Structured and semi-structured questionnaires.
- Interview guidelines.
- Digital tools for social media analysis (study of trending hashtags, online campaigns, etc.).

5. Data Analysis

- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis of interviews and social media content.
- **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical analysis of survey data.
- **Social Media Trends:** Study of number of posts, shares, comments, and reactions related to migration

Table: Comparison of Temporary Migration (2011–2018 vs 2018–2022)

District	Persons who temporarily migrated from Gram Panchayats (2011–2018)	Persons who temporarily migrated from Gram Panchayats (2018–2022)
Haridwar	8,168	28,087
Udham Singh Nagar	6,064	19,583
Almora	53,611	54,519
Nainital	20,951	20,863
Uttarkashi	19,893	19,649
Pithoragarh	31,786	25,715
Champawat	20,332	13,711
Rudraprayag	22,735	14,593
Bageshwar	23,388	14,503
Pauri	47,488	29,093
Tehri	71,509	41,359
Chamoli	32,020	16,326
Dehradun	25,781	9,309
Total (Uttarakhand)	**383,726**	**307,310**

Source: Migration Commission Report
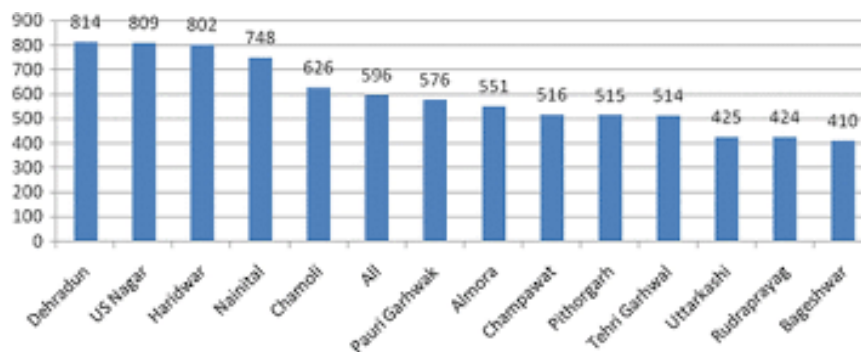
Reasons for Migration from Villages

Cause	Percentage
Employment	45%
Education	50%
Lack of health facilities	5%

WitWaves
Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

International Peer-Reviewed E-Journal
E-ISSN: 3107-4235

Vol – 2
Issue – 10
October
2025

Major Causes of Migration in Uttarakhand

Migration in Uttarakhand is a serious problem, especially in the hilly regions. Large numbers of people are leaving villages for urban areas in search of employment, education, and a better standard of living. Several economic, social, and environmental factors are responsible for this movement. The principal reasons for migration in Uttarakhand are:

1. **Education:** Education is essential for the future of any society. However, educational standards in hill areas are very low. In remote and difficult-to-reach places there are often no facilities for young children; they must travel several kilometers to reach schools. School infrastructure is frequently poor; basic learning materials such as notebooks and textbooks are often unavailable on time. Because of this lack of quality education, many families are forced to move from villages and hills to provide better schooling and future prospects for their children.
2. **Lack of Employment:** There are almost no employment opportunities in the hills of Uttarakhand, which compels youth to move to big cities, leaving mountain villages deserted. If schools are not functioning properly and educational facilities are inadequate, children cannot become competent and employment opportunities remain scarce. The government lacks sufficient schemes focused on employment in these areas. As a result, the youth either join the armed forces or leave their villages to take small jobs in far-off towns.
3. **Lack of Health Facilities:** One of the biggest reasons for migration is inadequate health infrastructure in the hills. About 90% of villages still lack primary health centers, and where such centers exist they suffer from a severe shortage of doctors and medicines. When someone falls ill, they are often carried on stretchers for several kilometers to reach a road and then taken to the nearest hospital; delays can be life-threatening and sometimes patients die en route. For treatment of complicated illnesses, people must travel to cities like Dehradun or Delhi, which involves loss of time and risk to life. In remote areas, delayed access to healthcare and lack of ambulances/transportation increases avoidable deaths.
4. **Road and Transport Problems:** Although Uttarakhand separated from Uttar Pradesh 24 years ago, hundreds of villages still lack road access. Where roads exist, their condition is often poor—unpaved or improperly maintained—leading to accidents and loss of life.
5. **Concentration of Industrial Units in Cities:** Industries are established mainly in cities, with little attention paid to the hills. This creates jobs in urban areas while increasing unemployment and lack of opportunities in mountain regions, pushing people to migrate in search of work.
6. **Lack of Basic Amenities:** Shortage of basic facilities in villages—such as employment, education, healthcare, electricity, housing, and road connectivity—also drives migration. Telecommunication connectivity remains a major problem in the hills; while the world talks about 5G, many remote villages still lack reliable internet. The absence of such basic amenities encourages people to move out.
7. **Dependence on Agriculture:** Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood here, but hill farming has become unprofitable and difficult.
8. **Youth Migration:** Young people migrate to big cities (e.g., Delhi, Dehradun) in search of jobs.
9. **Natural Disasters:** Landslides and floods in hilly areas have made many villages unsafe and forced residents to relocate.
10. **Climate Change:** Altered weather patterns and depletion of natural resources have made agriculture and livelihoods precarious.
11. **Attraction of Urban Life:** The younger generation is attracted to better lifestyle, facilities, and modernity available in cities.
12. **Better Living Conditions:** Cities offer superior education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.
13. **Environmental and Social Causes (e.g., Tehri Dam):** Projects like the Tehri Dam caused displacement and rehabilitation issues, forcing many families to leave their native villages.
14. **Statistic quoted in the report:** "Among all those who migrated in the state, 50.16% left in search of employment, while 15.21% migrated for education."

Daily-life Impact of Social Media (Summary)

- Rapid communication medium.
- Consolidates information in one place.
- Provides easy access to news and updates.
- Accessible to all groups—literate and less-literate.
- No formal gatekeeping of content: anyone can publish.
- Photos, videos, documents are easily shareable.

Solutions & Recommendations

Migration is a major social and economic problem in Uttarakhand. The solution cannot come only from policy statements; it must be implemented through effective ground-level programs, community participation, and social awareness. The chief recommendations to stop migration from the hills are:

1. **Provide steady employment opportunities**
    - Ensure continuous employment options in the hills to give people economic security and improve living standards.
    - Promote local industries: traditional handicrafts, tourism, medicinal/herbal industries, and agriculture-based enterprises.
    - Encourage self-employment: skill-development programs and easy credit for youth.
    - Revive village industries using local resources to create small and medium enterprises.

2. **Provide basic amenities**
    - Town-like facilities in hill areas: transport, roads, primary health centers, educational institutions, reliable electricity, drinking water, and proper legal access to employment and justice.
    - Open training centers and provide finance for self-employment and skill training for job-seeking youth and migrant workers.
    - Create employment alternatives such as weaving, handloom, cottage industries, and food-processing units.
    - Provide social security measures, community employment training, and child health and education facilities.

3. **Establish industrial units in the hills**
    - Set up appropriate industries in hill areas to create local jobs so people need not migrate to cities.

4. **Ensure corruption-free administration**
    - Although government schemes exist, corruption often prevents benefits from reaching people. There should be effective oversight of rural Panchayati Raj area implementation.

5. **Strengthen agriculture**
    - Train farmers in modern techniques and better seeds.
    - Create processing and storage units to increase farmer incomes.
    - Promote organic farming, leveraging Uttarakhand's environmental advantages.

6. **Develop basic infrastructure**
    - Roads and transport: better connectivity to link rural areas to markets and services.
    - Education and health: quality schools and healthcare in hill areas.
    - Digital connectivity: strengthen internet/mobile networks so people can access digital jobs and education.

7. **Promote sustainable tourism**
    - Encourage eco- and community-based tourism that respects local ecology and culture.
    - Support homestays and bring lesser-known scenic villages onto tourism maps.

8. **Revive migration-affected villages**
    - Undertake special revival schemes for villages heavily affected by migration; involve villagers on the basis of their priorities.

9. **Education and skill development**
    - Provide quality schools and colleges in rural areas.
    - Train youth in skills needed for local employment and entrepreneurship.

10. **Women's empowerment**
    - Make women self-reliant through education and skill development programs.

11. **Governance and policy reform**
    - Ensure public participation in policy-making and implementation.
    - Create a specific migration policy with target-based programs for affected areas.
    - Maintain transparency and accountability in development program implementation.

12. **Social awareness and media use**
    - Run campaigns to sensitize people about migration's adverse effects and possible solutions.
    - Use social media to highlight local problems and build public opinion for reforms.

13. **Disaster management and rehabilitation**
    - Prepare long-term plans for rehabilitation of disaster-affected areas.

14. **Combat climate change**
- Focus on climate adaptation and resource management so agriculture and livelihoods remain viable.

15. **Engage the diaspora**
- Encourage Uttarakhandis living outside the state to invest and participate in village development.
- Utilize diaspora skills and experience for local development.

References

1. Devi, R. (2020). *Role of Radio in Rural Communication: A Study of Uttarakhand.* Journal of Communication Studies, 15(2), 45–56.
2. Kumar, A., &Thapliyal, M. (2022). *Social Media and Digital Activism in the Himalayan States.* Media Research Review, 10(1), 78–91.
3. McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory.* Sage Publications.
4. Negi, R. S., & Joshi, H. (2021). *Migration and Development in Uttarakhand: Trends and Challenges.* Himalayan Development Review, 8(3), 32–49.
5. Sati, V. P. (2020). *Outmigration and Socioeconomic Transformation in Uttarakhand.* Springer.
6. Pant, B.R.& Chand, R. (2014): Uttarakhand Jansankhyatmale Jhalak,
7. Kandari, P. (2013). Migration Pattern and the increasing Participation of Females in the Economy of Hill Rural Areas: A Study of Pauri district in Uttarakhand. Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 17(5), 27-33.
8. www devbhomimedia.com
9. www.rajyasameeksha.com
10. www.gaoncannection.com
11. www.uttarakhandpalayananayog.com
12. www.mirroruttarakhand.com
13. www.downtoerth.org.in
14. www.jantak.com
15. www.prabhatkhabar.com
16. Khabaruttarakhand.com
17. Youthkiawaaz.com
18. Google.com

YouTube Channel

1. Gaonconnection tv
2. Uttarakhandlive
3. Chingari