

These Uttarakhand villages run their own Instagram channel

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This image of snow-clad peaks was posted by a 17-year-old

Highlights

[@voicesofmunsiri could easily be the country's first community-run Instagram channel. Here's where young people from the villages of Munsiri block of Pithoragarh district upload photos and share stories with the world. Limited mobile connectivity and basic English can't stop them.](#)

NAINITAL: Winter has finally come, it's time to take the morning off and enjoy the #earthly #pleasure of #heavenly #pristine snow," reads one post with a photo of snow-clad fields on the [Instagram channel](#) @voicesofmunsiri. This is no holiday post by a visiting citydweller, but the musings of a villager in Munsiri, a Himalayan settlement in Uttarakhand near the India-China border. With more than 100 posts, the channel already has close to 1,000 followers.

@voicesofmunsiri could easily be the country's first [community-run Instagram channel](#). Here's where young people from the villages of [Munsiri block of Pithoragarh district](#) upload photos and share stories with the world — of their lives, forests, colours of seasons and mountains — limited mobile connectivity and basic English notwithstanding.

Initially I was worried whether I would be able to shoot good photographs, post them and write stories. However, as months went on, with every post, I got better in clicking photographs and writing," says 17-year-old Alka Rautela.

The Instagram channel came into being through the efforts of Shivya Nath, 27, an itinerant traveller who quit her digital marketing job five years ago to travel the world.

Shivya was in Munsiri in May last year and inspired village folk who had smartphones to share their stories with the world.

A tutorial on how to use the Instagram app along with some photography tips was all it took to get them started. Shivya, who put up in a homestay in Sarmoli village, says she was inspired by the villagers' organic way of life. "The idea was to leverage Instagram to encourage the locals to share their life philosophy directly with the world."

From the joy of snow-laden winters to farming of potato and rajma, the stories are many and varied.

Trilok Singh Rana, 30, who works as a tourist guide, says he likes to post pictures of different things. "Whenever I go for treks, I take photographs of mountains, birds, flowers and butterflies. I like to capture the joys and struggles of living in such a remote place. I also upload photos of our local cuisine and the fruits found here," explains Rana, who didn't have a smartphone till recently and would use a computer to upload photos.

Malika Viridi, co-founder of Maati Sangathan — a women's organisation that runs village homestays and local wool enterprises, and initiates protests against tree-cutting and alcoholism — says the internet exposure is helping villagers connect with modern technology, while retaining their traditions of warm hospitality, pride in their language and growing their own food. "Being on Instagram helps bridge the gap between so-called 'urban' and 'rural'," says Malika. The Instagram channel has also generated interest among online communities, from tourists, food bloggers, and social enterprises. "They've shown interest in staying with us to experience the mountain village life, participate in organic farming and birdwatching, and savour our traditional food," says Malika. Many village women double up as hiking guides for tourists.

Some say they too would like to be on Instagram, but worry if they are tech-savvy enough. "We can barely pronounce Instagram correctly, how can we use the app?" says Bina, sitting in Maati Sangathan's one-room office. Her companion, Basanti, chuckles. "We are smarter than smartphones, we can use technology easily," she says.

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