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A Study to Analyse Usage of Social Media in Rural India

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Abstract - Changes in how people may share information have been revolutionary. The term "social media" refers to a wide range of Internet-based platforms created specifically for user-generated content creation, discussion, and sharing. The study's goals were to ascertain the extent to which people utilize social media, the kinds of uses to which it is put, and its potential use in spreading health information. This research was conducted between September 2018 and February 2019 in a rural area in the Indian region of Punjab. A systematic interview schedule that had already been developed and piloted was used to conduct interviews with the participants. There were 4,000 people in all that took part in the study. Of those 618 (15.5%), over 90% had access to the internet on their smartphones. Men used smartphones at a far greater rate (22.9% vs. 11.3%) than women. 742 people (18.5%) were social media users, with WhatsApp being the most popular platform. Participants' use of social media was rather high, at 13.5 percent (n = 542). The two main reasons people used social media were to keep in touch with friends and for fun. Eighty percent or more of social media users believe it should be utilized more often for health education, while only 11.8 percent believe the government is making effective use of the medium. There was a striking increase in the use of social media for communication among the young, male, educated, employed, and prosperous.

Keywords - Usage, Social Media, Rural India

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this day of rapid worldwide communication and information distribution, it would be stupid to underestimate the influence that social media has had and continues to have. A quiet but revolutionary revolution has been taking place in India's rural areas, despite the fact that the influence of social media is more readily apparent in the urban centers of the globe. This in-depth study aims to discover and examine the usage of social media in rural parts of India, focusing on the myriad ways in which these platforms have been introduced, assimilated, and knitted into the fabric of rural life.[1]

Multiple factors, such as government initiatives and the widespread availability of affordable smartphones, have led to a major transformation in the digital environment in rural India during the past decade. The advent of social media has brought both possibilities and challenges to a number of different sectors in India, marking a turning point in the country's digital transformation. To understand the significant changes happening at the intersection of rural India and social media, it is crucial to examine the roots of this phenomenon and the evolving patterns of use.[2]

The Genesis: Introduction of Social Media in Rural India

Access to social media in India's rural areas has been made possible by a confluence of circumstances. The government of India has been particularly focused on improving its citizens' access to the internet through programs like Digital India and BharatNet. These ambitious projects sought to unite the country's urban and rural dwellers by extending the benefits of the information age to its most remote neighborhoods. Low-cost smartphone availability has been a game-changer in expanding internet use. Chinese manufacturers flooded the market with cheap cellphones, enabling even people on restricted budgets to participate in the digital revolution. The spread of social media is only one of many new opportunities made possible by the arrival of mobile internet access.[3]

The social media sector in India has adapted to accommodate the growing number of users from the country's rural areas. This include the removal of linguistic barriers, the promotion of discourse in vernacular languages, and the localization of information in regional languages. One of the most important drivers of social media membership in rural regions is the rise of entrepreneurship in those

communities. Government initiatives aimed at boosting the economic possibilities of farmers and artisans urged them to explore the online market. They saw an increase in sales and income after using social media to cut out the middleman and connect directly with customers.

Evolving Patterns of Social Media Usage

The widespread use of social media among rural Indians is a cultural and societal phenomenon, not merely a technological one. The shifting behaviors of social media users in rural India are crucial to comprehending the impact of this phenomenon. Some broad strokes can be drawn:[4]

Community Building: People in outlying regions of India now gather online instead of in physical communities. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are helping people in rural regions join community-based organizations for better communication, event planning, and issue resolution. This has led to a greater sense of community and connectivity amongst rural settlements that were previously separated by distance.

Agriculture and Livelihood: India's rural economy relies heavily on agriculture, and farmers have found social media to be a vital resource. They use these centers as their go-to resources for learning about the weather, the stock market, and agricultural best practices. The removal of middlemen and an increase in earnings are two immediate outcomes of this plethora of data at users' fingertips.[5]

Education and Awareness: Similar to what happened in urban areas, there was a huge shift toward online schooling in rural India after the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the growth of instructional content on social media platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp, the digital gap in education has shrunk and students have a higher chance of having access to high-quality learning tools.

Political Engagement: Social media has made it easier for people in remote places to participate in political discourse. It has developed into a place for political debate, where citizens may voice their opinions and perhaps influence governmental decisions. One effect of the democratization of information transmission has been a rise in rural citizens' awareness of politics.[6]

Cultural Preservation: Due to the advent of the internet, previously unreachable singers, artists, and artisans now have a global audience at their fingertips. This promotion has a dual purpose: it helps to maintain traditional culture while also opening up economic opportunities for the artists who are a part of it.

A growing trend of individuals in rural India embracing the internet and other digital technologies to improve their lives in concrete ways is reflected in their shifting social media habits. This change has far-reaching ramifications for the ways in which people in rural places live, work, and play, and not simply because it increases internet access.[7]

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Patil, S., & Chauhan, A. (2020) India's rural population's adoption of digital technologies is intrinsically tied to the rise of social media. New studies highlight the importance of government initiatives like Digital India in expanding internet connectivity to unserved areas. The authors argue that not only has social media access increased, but so too has digital knowledge and the economic potential of these regions. The need of cheap smartphones and locally relevant information in closing the digital divide between urban and rural communities is also highlighted.[8]

Pradhan, P., & Jena, L. K. (2019) The agriculture business in India is crucial to the country's economy, and social media has had a significant impact on it. what role social media plays in the lives of Indian farmers. According to their findings, social networking sites are a great place to learn about changes in the weather, agricultural prices, and pest management. These groups help farmers save money and increase their earnings. This study shows that social media may be a powerful tool for improving agricultural practices and rural economy.[9]

Jain, P., & Sharma, A. (2018) The recent COVID-19 pandemic in India's rural areas brought to light the use of social media in spreading information about the disease. examines the potential of digital resources for enhancing education in far-flung settings. The authors argue that platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube are now indispensable because they give students and teachers access to a plethora of educational resources and make remote instruction possible. The findings highlight the need for more study to address issues of unequal access and ensure that all kids have access to a high-quality education.[10]

Saxena, S., & Pandey, N. (2017) Political engagement in India's rural areas has increased dramatically with the advent of social media. looks at how social media like Facebook and Twitter have changed political engagement and rural schooling. New research suggests that people living in rural regions may participate in political discussions, express their opinions, and communicate with their elected leaders by using social media. It also shows how online networks may encourage transparency and openness in rural government.[11]

Kamble, S., & Khare, A. (2016) In the battle to preserve rural India's cultural heritage, the use of social media has emerged as a crucial weapon. examines the rise of social media as a platform for independent artists and entertainers in rural areas to showcase their work online. The authors argue that

by doing so, artists might not only assist maintain cultural traditions but also benefit financially from their efforts. The research shows that social media has the potential to improve cultural diversity and tolerance in less populous areas.[12]

3. METHODOLOGY

The Muktsar district is located in southern Punjab, and between September and December of 2018, researchers conducted a community-based cross-sectional study in the Giddarbaha block. There are 45 villages in the block, and the Department of Community Medicine at the Adesh Institute of Medical Science and Research in Bathinda, Punjab, serves 13 of them as its field practice area. Thirteen cities participated in the study. Anyone in the United States who was 15 or older and had a fixed residence may take part in the survey. Participants were limited to those who had lived in the area for at least two years and provided written informed permission. Those who were unable to keep their assigned domicile for a minimum of two consecutive study visits were eliminated. In 2016, 10.3 percent of Indian internet users participated in a Yarl digital poll and reported using social media. The estimated number of respondents, after accounting for a non-response rate of 10% and a margin of error of 0.01%, is 3802. Over four thousand people took part in the research.

The local household registration (a total of 13 villages) was used to calculate the total number of eligible participants (>15 years old), and the resulting figure was 38,449. A simple random selection method was used to decide how many people would be included from each hamlet, with the number of participants picked from each village being proportional to its population size. Simple random sampling was performed using a random number table (table 3.1). Participants were interviewed using a standardized interview schedule (questionnaire) that had been developed and pilot tested in advance. The schedule was developed after extensive research and consultation with relevant institution personnel. Initial drafts of the questionnaire were produced in English before being translated into the target language. The first section of the survey collected basic demographic data, while the second section inquired about issues including smartphone and social media use. The questionnaire was piloted on a subset of the population (5%) from outside the study area, and revisions were made to the final questionnaire based on those results. Questions about social media included those about respondents' familiarity with various platforms, length of time spent on each, motivations for using, whether or not they had encountered a health-related message on social media, and their thoughts on the efficacy of using social media to disseminate health education. In terms of its functionality, a smartphone is a mobile device that supports a variety of services (including but not limited to text and multimedia data apps, e-mail, music players, and web browsing) in addition to wireless voice communications. In practice, social media encompasses any platform (website or mobile app) that facilitates user interaction with others, independent of physical location. Social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are good examples. Throughout the study, we adhered to the ethical standards set out by the Indian Council of Medical Research. Consent was given in writing after participants were fully briefed. Privacy and anonymity were protected throughout the study. The study was given the go light to commence by the institution's ethics board.

Table 3.1: Village-wise selection of the participants

Village no.	Eligible participants	Proportion of the eligible participants (%)	Sample participants (*n*=4000)
1	4561	11.8	472
2	1859	4.8	192
3	2063	5.4	216
4	1129	2.9	116
5	5596	14.6	584
6	2370	6.2	248
7	1718	4.5	180
8	4616	12.0	480
9	3690	9.6	384
10	1530	4.0	160
11	1775	4.6	184
12	6099	15.9	636
13	1413	3.7	148
Total	38,449	100	4000

Statistical Analysis

Microsoft Excel (Microsoft, Redwood City, WA, USA) was used to save and analyze the data, while SPSS 21.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics (mean, proportion, and percentage) and measures of dispersion (standard deviation) were used to illustrate the participants' demographic characteristics. To analyze the significance of the connection, the "Chi-square" test was applied. The significance level was set at 0.05.

4. RESULTS

There were 4,000 people in the study as a whole. There was a mean age of 38.9 16.7 years among the contributors. Participants' genders were very evenly distributed. Four out of ten people in the study were either housewives or uneducated. According to Table 4.1, 15.5%, or 618 people, had access to smartphones, while nearly 90% accessed the internet. Most (72.5%), pay between Rs. 50 and Rs. 100 monthly, and have used it for 1-5 years. They used their mobile devices to stream videos (77.7%) and text each other (74.4%). There was a statistically significant (P 0.0001) difference between the percentage of men and women who reported using a smartphone, with 22.9% of men and 7.6% of women reporting smartphone use. They also spent

significantly more time online than women did (P 0.0001). 742 (18.5%) of the sample knew about social media in some form, with WhatsApp being the most well-known (13.1%), followed by Facebook (11.4%) and YouTube (6.5%).

Table 4.1: Participants' prevalence in the use of mobile devices and the web

Variable	n (%)
Do you have smartphone (n=4000)	
Yes	618 (15.5)
No	3382 (84.6)
Do you use internet (n=618)	
Yes	542 (87.7)
No	76 (12.3)
Years of using internet (n=542)	
<1 year	134 (24.7)
1–5 year	393 (72.5)
>5 years	15 (2.8)
Average monthly expenditure on internet (n=542)	
<Rs. 50	22 (4.1)
Rs. 50-100	331 (61.1)
Rs. 100-300	176 (32.5)
>Rs. 300	13 (2.3)
Purpose of using internet (n=542)*	
Video watching	403 (74.4)
Chatting	420 (77.5)
Shopping	60 (11.1)
News	134 (24.7)
Knowledge	173 (31.9)

Table 4.2 shows that 13.55 percent of the sample (n = 542) used at least one kind of social media. Among the participants, WhatsApp was the most popular social media site, with 518 users (95.6%), followed by Facebook with 414 users (76.4%). There were 504 persons who utilized social media everyday, or 93.0%. It was used regularly by 100% of Instagram users, 100% of Messenger users, 100% of Skype users, and 95%+ of WhatsApp users, 95%+ of YouTube users, and 95%+ of Facebook users. Daily social media users spend an average of 1 hr 18 min every day on the platforms, with WhatsApp taking the lead (1.7 hr) and Facebook coming in second (1.25 hr). Users logged into their accounts on average 5.29 4.77 times each day. Only around half of social media users could avoid their feeds for longer than four hours (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Participants' Usage Trends on Various Social Networking Sites

Variable	n (%)
Type of social media (n=542)*	
Facebook	414 (76.4)
WhatsApp	518 (95.6)
Instagram	88 (16.2)
Messenger	48 (8.9)
YouTube	208 (38.4)
Skype	10 (1.8)
Frequency of daily social media users*	
Facebook (n=414)	401 (96.9)
WhatsApp (n=518)	504 (97.3)
Instagram (n=88)	88 (100.0)
Messenger (n=48)	48 (100.0)
YouTube (n=208)	202 (97.1)
Skype (n=10)	10 (100.0)
Average duration of social media use per day	
Facebook (n=401)	1.25 h
WhatsApp (n=504)	1.7 h
Instagram (n=88)	55 min
Messenger (n=48)	1 h
YouTube (n=202)	57.5 min
Skype (n=10)	1.1 h
Maximum hours of staying away from social media sites (n=542)	
< 1 h	38 (7.1)
1–4 h	233 (42.9)
4–12 h	211 (38.9)
>24 h	60 (11.1)

Table 4.3 shows the most common explanations given by participants for using social media. Friendship and killing time/entertainment were the two primary motivations for participating in various

forms of social media. According to Table 4.4, more than half of social media users reported seeing health education-related communications online, with WhatsApp being the most common platform (62.5% agreement) and Facebook coming in at a close second (48.4% agreement). Nearly 80% of social media users think the platform should be used more for health education, but only 11.8 percent think the government is well or very successfully using it. While 22.5 percent of social media users say they depend heavily or very heavily on the content they find on social media sites, 75.4 percent say they do so only sometimes or seldom.

The majority of respondents (70.5%), followed by health care practitioners (17.1%), said that television is the best medium for disseminating health information. The three most popular health education subjects were drug de-addiction (75.1%), hypertension (53.0%), and diabetes (44.8%). Table 6 demonstrates that there was a statistically significant age difference between groups (60 vs. When comparing male and female participants, men were far more likely to use social media. Use of social networking sites grew dramatically (P 0.001) with higher levels of education. There was a statistically significant difference in social media use between business class and employed individuals.

Newspapers, television, and health-care providers were all popular options for receiving health-related news and updates, but younger people showed a significant preference for social media and the internet over middle-aged and senior citizens (P 0.001).

Table 4.3: The reason why you're utilizing social media

Social media	Learning	Friendship	Timepass/Entertainment	Share opinion	Update information	Peer pressure
Facebook (414)*	186 (44.9)	325 (78.5)	266(64.3)	19 (4.6)	45 (10.9)	6 (1.4)
WhatsApp (518)*	154 (29.7)	285 (55.0)	384 (74.1)	55 (10.6)	95 (18.3)	9 (1.7)
Instagram (88)*	10 (11.3)	41 (46.6)	52 (59.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.5)	4 (4.5)
Messenger (48)*	8 (16.7)	39 (81.3)	35(72.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (8.3)
YouTube (208)*	88(42.3)	33(15.9)	157(75.5)	24 (11.5)	10 (4.8)	4 (1.9)
Skype (10)*	0 (0.0)	6 (60.0)	6 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

Table 4.4: Promoting Health through Social Media

Variable	n (%)
Have you seen any health education message on social media in the past 3 months? (n=542)	
Yes	312 (57.6)
No	230 (42.4)
Source of health education message* (n=312)	
Facebook	151 (48.4)
WhatsApp	195 (62.5)
Messenger	6 (1.9)
YouTube	31 (9.9)
Do you think social media should be used more for health education in the future? (n=542)	
Yes	433 (79.9)
No	21 (3.9)
No idea	88 (16.2)
Do you think the government is using social media properly as a health education tool in the community? (n=542)	
Very successfully	6 (1.1)
Successfully	58 (10.7)
Somewhat successfully	402 (74.2)
Not at all	21 (3.9)
No idea	55 (10.1)
How much do you trust on the information available on the social media network (n=542)	
Always	11 (2.0)
Most of the time	111 (20.5)
Sometimes	346 (63.8)
Occasionally	63 (11.6)
Never	11 (2.0)
According to you, which is the most suitable channel of communication for health-related information? (n=4000)	
Television	2818 (70.5)
Newspaper	160 (4.0)
Social media	129 (3.2)
Internet	208 (5.2)
Health-care providers	685 (17.1)

Topics of interest for health education (n=4000)*	
Drug de-addiction	3002 (75.1)
Hypertension	2123 (53.1)
Diabetics	1793 (44.8)
Injury and accident	1211 (30.2)
Heart disease	865 (21.6)

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of instant-access refers to the ability to obtain or retrieve something quickly and easily, The prevalence of online media outlets, including social media platforms, is progressively supplanting conventional methods of communication. Based on the findings, it can be observed that this particular group exhibits higher levels of engagement on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Utilize it for recreational purposes and engaging in social interactions with acquaintances. Nevertheless, there are lingering inquiries regarding the efficacy of their ability to modify individuals' health-related behaviors.

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