

A Study on the Impact of Social Media on the Lives of Rural Women in Western Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Social media is rapidly transforming the landscape of rural life and society. The most significant aspect of rural life—cooperation and harmony—is gradually disappearing. Due to social media, not only has the traditional rural community gathering (Chaupal) disappeared, but social media itself has become the new Chaupal. Women's use of social media is steadily increasing, with the highest surge observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, rural women generally spend only one to two hours daily on social media, with the percentage of users declining as usage time increases.

Among social media platforms, rural women engage the most with YouTube, where they watch videos extensively. Their interest in Instagram is also growing, along with a rising trend in listening to music and consuming entertainment content. Social media has had a profound impact on the lives of rural women. Women in Western Uttar Pradesh believe that social media plays a crucial role in education and providing health-related information. Many women report gaining health-related knowledge through social media, which benefits them. However, most women feel that social media does not provide significant employment-related information, thus limiting job opportunities for them.

Social media has played a negative role in eliminating superstitions and social evils in rural areas, as it has, in some cases, contributed to their spread. Significant changes are occurring in rural customs, traditions, and cultures due to social media, which should not be ignored. This indicates that social media has both positive and negative impacts on rural women.

Keywords: 1 Social Media, 2 Village, 3 Rural Women, 4 Rural Life.

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of everyone's life, functioning as an omnipresent means of communication. It has influenced rural life just as much as urban life. Extensive research is being conducted on the effects of social media in various fields such as education, health, politics, society, development, and among adolescents, youth, elderly, and women. Studies have also explored its impact on rural life in different parts of the country. However, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically examining the influence of social media on rural women in Western Uttar Pradesh.

Rural life is a broad term that describes the lifestyle of people living in non-urban areas. It encompasses community life, agriculture, politics, economy, education, health, caste, religion, local customs, cultural traditions, religious practices, and social interactions. Unlike urban settings, rural communities are often closely knit, where people rely on mutual cooperation. Agriculture and animal husbandry form the

backbone of rural life, with most people engaged in farming to sustain their families. Compared to urban life, rural life is typically simpler, more interconnected with nature, and slower in pace.

Research Problem

For holistic development, it is essential to include women in the mainstream of progress. Urban women are generally considered more educated, aware, and self-reliant. In contrast, rural women often lag behind in education, awareness, and economic independence. There is no doubt that the lives, problems, and challenges of rural women are significantly different from those of urban women. Although studies have been conducted on the impact of social media in other parts of the country, there has been no comprehensive study on its impact on women in Western Uttar Pradesh. This research aims to fill that gap by examining the effects of social media on rural women in this region.

Literature Review

Several researchers have explored the impact of social media on rural areas:

1. Anmol Rai Gupta & Zafar Shahila – In their research paper "Rural India: The Next Frontier for Social Media Networks," they highlight social media's contribution to agriculture and healthcare in rural areas. Rural social media usage is catching up with urban areas.
2. Ekta Bansal – In "Impact of Social Media on Rural India," she emphasizes that social media can drive rural development by providing farmers with opportunities and enabling online crop sales.
3. Swati Gupta (2016) – In "A Study on the Impact of Social Media in Rural Development," she argues that social media has both positive and negative effects on rural areas. It helps in disseminating information, improving agricultural practices, and fostering community engagement, but also poses challenges such as digital illiteracy.
4. Neha Bhushan & Shashikant – In "Role of Social Media in the Life of Rural Women: A Case of Eastern Uttar Pradesh," they assert that social networking increases women's skills, confidence, and knowledge while reducing communication gaps.
5. Gurpreet Kaur & Praneet Kaur – In "Effect of Social Media on Rural Women: A Literature Review," they state that social media helps women stay connected with friends, relatives, and communities, influencing their lifestyle and entertainment choices.
6. Amrit Raj Kapoor & Dr. Manisha Pandey – In "A Study to Analyze the Usage of Social Media in Rural India: Exploring Its Impact on Health Education," they find that social media is gradually replacing traditional communication methods, with increased participation in platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp.
7. Prof. Shirin Abbas & Prof. A.K. Singh – In their study on "Social Media Usage Among Girls Aged 12-20 in Barabanki, a Backward District of Central Uttar Pradesh," they report that young girls primarily use mobile phones for entertainment.

These studies indicate that social media has a far-reaching impact on all aspects of life. However, research specifically focusing on the impact of social media on rural women in Western Uttar Pradesh is lacking.

Research Objectives

1. How has social media affected the lives of rural women? Are these changes positive or negative?

2. What benefits do rural women gain from social media in terms of education, health, and employment?
3. How do rural women use social media, and what role does it play in their development?

Research Hypotheses

1. Social media has a significant impact on rural women's lives.
2. Rural women primarily use social media for entertainment.
3. Social media is eroding cultural and traditional values.
4. Social media has simplified the lives of rural women.

Study Area of the Research

For the present research study, titled “The Impact of Social Media on the Lives of Rural Women in Western Uttar Pradesh”, a total of 115 rural female respondents were selected from 12 districts of Western Uttar Pradesh. These districts include Meerut, Baghpat, Muzaffarnagar, Bulandshahr, Saharanpur, Hapur, Ghaziabad, Amroha, Shamli, Mathura, Aligarh, and Hathras.

While selecting villages, an effort was made to include both types of settlements: one village that is remote and underdeveloped and another that is relatively developed and situated near a major road. For instance, in Meerut district, Bisaula village in Mawana tehsil represents a typical rural setting, while some villages are economically prosperous. Similarly, the Khadar villages in Hastinapur, Meerut, are economically backward, whereas Jaula village in Budhana tehsil, Muzaffarnagar, is relatively larger and closer to the city. Significant differences were observed between villages in Meerut and those in Mathura and Aligarh.

Socio-Economic Background

The most significant characteristic of the selected villages is that their residents are primarily engaged in agricultural activities. Despite adopting aspects of modern lifestyles, they still represent rural life, culture, and traditional village characteristics. The conventional image of rural life is not always evident here, as urban influences are strongly reflected. Large concrete houses make it difficult to distinguish these villages from urban areas, yet rural elements such as tractors, farming tools, buffalo carts, agricultural activities, cattle rearing, and dung cake stacks are prominent, depicting the essence of rural life.

Some villages are economically prosperous, emphasizing commercial agriculture, which has significantly improved their standard of living. Modern amenities such as air conditioners, coolers, refrigerators, and other household appliances are common in these households. In contrast, some villages, situated far from urban centers and towns, remain socially and economically backward, still maintaining all traditional rural features.

The usage and impact of social media varied across these different locations. However, since social media presents uniform content, its influence was observed to be similar across villages. Women in these villages represent both traditional and modern lifestyles—some are engaged in traditional activities like making dung cakes, working in fields, and following purdah (veil system), while others embrace contemporary fashion and styles. Newly married women are generally more tech-savvy regarding social media, and their dependence on it is increasing.

Research Methodology

To derive conclusions for this research study, the following research methods were primarily employed:

- Qualitative Method – This method was used to describe facts related to social phenomena based on qualitative attributes.
- Survey Method – This was the most extensively used method in the study. Through a structured questionnaire, 115 women were interviewed, including both educated and uneducated respondents, as well as young girls and older women.

Sample Selection for the Study

For selecting the research sample, a stratified quota random sampling method was used. Initially, five out of the seven divisions of Western Uttar Pradesh were chosen: Meerut, Saharanpur, Aligarh, Moradabad, and Agra. A total of 12 districts were selected from these divisions:

- Meerut Division: Meerut, Hapur, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, and Baghpat
- Saharanpur Division: Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, and Shamli
- Aligarh Division: Aligarh and Hathras
- Moradabad and Agra Divisions: Amroha and Mathura, respectively.

Data Analysis and Opinions

Table 1: Since When Have Women Been Using Social Media?

(Data in Percentage)

Year Range	Before 2012	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	2020-2022
Women (%)	3	2	9	3	34	49

From Table 1, it is evident that 34% of women were using social media in 2018-19, which increased to the highest at 49% in 2020-22. The highest increase in social media usage among women was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2: How Much Time Do Women Spend on Social Media Daily?

(Data in Percentage)

Time Spent Daily	1-2 Hours	3-5 Hours	6-10 Hours	More than 10 Hours
Women (%)	59	33	7	1

Table 2 shows that 59% of women spend only 1-2 hours daily on social media. Meanwhile, 33% of women use it for 3-5 hours, 7% for 6-10 hours, and only 1% of women use social media for more than 10 hours a day. As social media usage time increases, the percentage of women decreases.

Table 3: What Do Women Do Most on Social Media?

(Data in Percentage)

Activity	Watching News	Sending Messages	Chatting	Playing Games	Entertainment	Listening to Music	Watching Videos	Studying
Women (%)	43	26	24	11	75	76	92	6

According to Table 3, 92% of women watch videos on social media, making it the most popular activity. Listening to music (76%) and entertainment (75%) follow closely. Only 6% of women use social media for studying, while 11% play games.

Table 4: Which Social Media Platform Do Women Use the Most?
(Data in Percentage)

Platform	Facebook	YouTube	WhatsApp	Instagram	Telegram	Snapchat	LinkedIn
Women (%)	9	46	16	27	1	1	0

Table 4 shows that 46% of women use YouTube the most, followed by Instagram (27%) and WhatsApp (16%). Facebook is in fourth place with 9% usage, while LinkedIn is not a preferred platform for women.

Table 5: Has Social Media Changed Women's Lives?
(Data in Percentage)

Level of Change	Very Much	Highly	Moderately	Slightly	Not at All
Women (%)	5	16	24	27	18

Table 5 indicates that 16% of women feel that social media has significantly changed their lives, while 27% believe their lives have changed slightly. A total of 45% of women acknowledge some level of change due to social media. However, 18% state that social media has not changed their lives at all.

Table 6: Does Social Media Provide Useful Information?
(Data in Percentage)

Type of Information	Education	Health	Employment
Yes (%)	87	82.6	34.8
No (%)	13	17.4	65.2
Total (%)	100	100	100

Table 6 shows that 87% of women find social media useful for education, while 82.6% get health-related information. However, only 34.8% of women receive employment-related information, indicating that job-related content is relatively scarce on social media for rural women.

Table 7: Has Social Media Helped Reduce Superstitions and Social Evils?
(Data in Percentage)

Level of Impact	Very Much	Highly	Moderately	Slightly	Not at All	Can't Say
Women (%)	3	15	27	28	14	13

Table 7 reveals that 28% of women believe social media has had a slight impact in reducing superstitions and social evils in rural areas. When combining "Moderately," "Highly," and "Very Much," a total of 45% of women feel that social media has played a role in reducing social evils.

**Table 8: Has Social Media Affected Traditions, Culture, and Customs?
(Data in Percentage)**

Level of Impact	Very Much	Highly	Moderately	Slightly	Not at All	Can't Say
Women (%)	7	31	22	25	13	2

According to Table 8, 31% of women believe social media has had a high impact on changing rural traditions, culture, and customs. When adding "Moderately," "Highly," and "Very Much," a total of 60% of women think social media has significantly influenced traditions and culture. However, 40% of women feel that social media has had little or no effect on these aspects.

Findings

- Social media has had both positive and negative effects on rural women in Western Uttar Pradesh. While it has made their lives easier, it provides limited employment-related information.
- Social media has played a role in educating rural women, helping them gain knowledge beyond traditional education. In the healthcare sector, its use has yielded positive outcomes.
- Social media has significantly impacted rural collectivism and interpersonal relationships. Most women acknowledged that it has influenced social cohesion and relationships.
- It has made life easier for most rural women.
- A majority of female respondents stated that social media has brought significant changes in traditional food habits.
- Many women mentioned that festivals and celebrations are being affected due to social media.
- Most women do not post anything on social media. However, many, including young girls, admitted that they take photos and create reels but refrain from posting them due to societal constraints, highlighting prevailing social restrictions.
- During COVID-19, the use of social media among women increased significantly.
- Most women spend only 1 to 2 hours on social media, while only 1% use it for more than 10 hours.
- The majority of women watch videos and entertainment-related content on social media, while only 6% use it for educational purposes. Some also play games on social media.
- YouTube is the most popular platform among rural women, followed by Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook.
- Most women agreed that social media has increased awareness in rural life.
- However, it has led to minimal changes in women's lives.
- Women in rural areas reported that social media has not played a significant role in eliminating superstitions and social evils; instead, it has contributed to their spread.
- The majority of women believe that social media has had a profound impact on rural customs, culture, and traditions.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that social media has had both positive and negative effects on rural women in Western Uttar Pradesh. It has increased awareness and made life easier for them, but it has not brought significant changes. Women take photos and create reels but refrain from posting them due to societal restrictions. While social media provides valuable information on education and healthcare, employment-related information remains limited. Social connections in rural areas have weakened, and

traditional food habits and festival celebrations have changed. Since COVID-19, the use of social media among rural women has increased, but they still do not spend excessive time on it. Most women watch entertainment-related content on YouTube, while Instagram usage is growing rapidly.

Recommendations

1. Awareness programs should be conducted by the government and NGOs to promote the positive use of social media among rural women. This will help them access information about government schemes and increase their participation in rural development.
2. Encouraging local and employment-related content on social media to enhance rural engagement and economic opportunities.

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