

## A Critical Analysis of Social Networking Sites Users of Rural India

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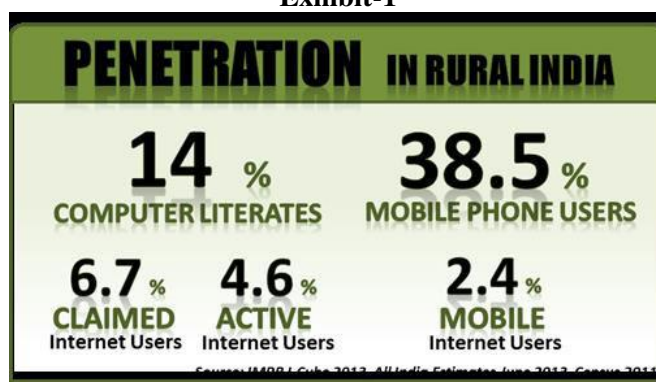
**Abstract:** Out of the 143 million social media users in the country (as of April 2015), 118 million are from urban areas while 25 million are from rural areas. Social media penetration in rural India has doubled in the past year, compared to urban areas, which witnessed around 35 per cent growth year-on-year, says a report published by IMRB International Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). Social media can augment communication and provide forums for rural communities. With the emergence of social networking, one who is digitally literate now has a major voice online. It enabled a new type of journalism that is subjective in nature. Objective of the present study is to investigate the percentage of rural youth who are aware of internet and Social Media. This study will also find out the gender differentiation in the utilization of Social Networking Sites among rural youth and verify how this ratio goes with the findings of the national survey. This study was conducted in rural area of district Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India. A sample of 800 male and female college going youth were randomly selected. A questionnaire was given to them to find out their awareness of Internet and activity on Social Networking Sites. Chi square test and t Test were applied to examine the following empirical hypothesis: Youth of Azamgarh is in line with the National ratio. There is a significant difference between male and female SNS users. Data was analyzed and result revealed that there is some significant gender difference in male and female SNS usage (Significant at 0.05 level). Percentage and chi square value shows that rural college going youth as compare to general rural population is more aware of internet. It is a pilot study which was conducted to examine the efficacy of IAMAI report and help the government to improve the participation of rural youth in this form of communication which has huge potential to enable social change.

**Key Words:** Chi Square test, IAMAI, IMRB International, Rural India, Social Media, Social Networking Sites, t-test, Youth

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Out of the 143 million social media users in the country (as of April 2015), 118 million are from urban areas while 25 million are from rural areas. Social media penetration in rural India has doubled in the past year, compared to urban areas, which witnessed around 35 per cent growth year-on-year, says a report published by IMRB International Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). The Internet and Mobile Association of India [IAMAI] is a young and vibrant association with ambitions of representing the entire gamut of digital businesses in India. It was established in 2004 by the leading online publishers. Rural India, as of June 2013, has a population of around 889 Mn. PC Literacy stands at 14% and the count of claimed Internet Users in Rural India stands at 6.7%. The penetration of the computer literates among the rural population has shown a sizeable increase from 8.4% in 2012 to 14% in 2013. The penetration of claimed internet users in rural India has gone up by 2% to 6.7% in 2013. Thanks to the fast emerging communication category, the penetration of Active Internet users has grown from 3.7% in 2012 to 4.6% in 2013. This translates into majority of rural families owning at least one internet enabled mobile phone.<sup>4</sup>

Exhibit-1



### 2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Furthermore, social media depends on mobile and web-

based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content. India, a land of over a billion, is home to a very small section that is connected to the Internet. We are witnessing a significant growth in this number every year. In spite of the many challenges associated with getting people online, India has embarked on this mammoth journey (Internet & Mobile Association of India, (2013).

### Exhibit-2



With more than 1.2 billion people, India is the world's second most-populated country (and its most populous democracy), and 243 million of its citizens – about 19 percent of the nation – now use the internet. And although mobile is far and away India's most significant digital audience – there are 886 million active mobile subscriptions throughout the country – social media usage, notably on Facebook, Google+ and Twitter, is growing in popularity. One hundred and six million people in India are active social media users, representing about 8 percent of the total population (<http://wearesocial.sg/>, Shea Bennett, n.d.). Social media can augment communication and provide forums for rural communities. With the emergence of social networking, one who is digitally literate now has a major voice online. It enabled a new type of journalism that is subjective in nature. The Indian society is an elaborate society with multi cultures, multi tribes and castes, multi lingual and the disparities between the urban and rural people. Since the birth of independent India, there is no denying the fact that India has grown as a nation and as economy rapidly with major growths from infrastructure to public health care, from communication sector to IT field and much more. But development is not a linear process but a multifaceted system with a complex idea. Even the rural India defies any definition of development. The Indian government has started many initiatives which have tried to encompass the large Indian crowd and while also many UN programs have been put to use in Indian villages. Besides that, many private social networks have taken the initiative like various NGOs, news channels, various web sites etc.

Social media has affected all spheres of rural people's lives: right from their livelihood to their healthcare, from traditions to social campaigns etc. Time and time again SNS have found a way and have realized their potential to become pioneers in rural development.<sup>1</sup> According to Shweta Bajpai and Sandeep Dalmia, Principal and Project Leader, the Boston Consulting Group, "Half of the internet population in India is rural, around 60% of these consumers do not have a smartphone, only 10% have a PC. Rural locations primarily have 2G access only."<sup>2</sup> According to IMAI and IMRB International, 71% male and 29% female are Internet users in India. The Internet usage among males has been growing at a rate of 50% while it is growing at 46% for female users. However, in Urban India, the ratio between male to female Internet users is 62:38. Significantly, Internet users among females are growing at a rate of 39% compared to 28% among males. Among the Rural Internet users, 88% are males. The Internet users among females are growing at 61% and 79% among males. 75% of the rural internet users belong to the age group of 18-30 years. Another 11% are in the age group of <18 years, while 8% belong to 31-45 years age group.<sup>5</sup> The vision for digital India is centered on three key areas: building digital infrastructure as a utility to every citizen, governance and services on demand and digital empowerment of citizens. Nine pillar of this growth are Broadband highways, universal access to mobil connectivity, public internet access program, e- governance, e-kranti, information for all, electronic manufacturing, IT for jobs and early harvest program.<sup>3</sup> From the digital perspective, India is divided into two very different communities: 70% of rural population vs. 30% of urban population. The latter has access to Google and Facebook; all the rest simply can't afford 2000 rupees (US\$30) for a monthly Internet connection, be it desktop or mobile. Mr. Tandon is the founder of Gram Vaani, an organization providing social media for rural India; a voice-based social network to connect families and farming communities living in outland villages. (Ghedini, 2013) Although many of the Indian villages are deprived of regular supply of electricity and the internet connectivity is still a farfetched dream for the masses but still there are success stories where Facebook, the famous social networking site has helped to make a difference in lives of rural people. As per a report in The Economic Times dated February 10, 2012, it saved many farmers of Maharashtra Sangli district s farmers from perishing. Due to oversupply of turmeric, prices crashed exorbitantly in the local market. One of the local farmers used Facebook to connect to other turmeric farmers across the

country and discussed the situation and discussed the prices with them. They decided not to participate in the local auction. Using social media, the news spread like a forest fire and 25000 turmeric farmers of Sangli heard of the boycott. The boycott served its purpose as the prices doubled. Earlier, a village sarpanch would sit under a tree and discuss certain issues with villagers before taking a final call. Facebook and Twitter are an extension of this concept.” Farmer bodies are quick to point out the advantages of social media.(Rai & Shahila, 2013).<sup>7</sup>

**2. OBJECTIVES:**

Objective of the present study is to investigate the percentage of rural youth who are aware of internet and Social Media, particularly Social Networking Sites. This study will also find out the gender differentiation in the utilization of Social Networking Sites among rural youth and verify how this percentage goes with the findings of the national survey.

**3. HYPOTHESIS:**

The following hypothesis was formulated for empirical verification:

- Youth of Azamgarh is in line with the National ratio.
- There is a significant difference between male and female SNS users.

**4. METHOD:**

**SAMPLE**

A sample of 400 male and 400 female college going youth were randomly selected with age group ranging from 16-25 years for the present study. The students were studying in rural inter colleges and degree colleges.

**TOOLS**

A questionnaire containing 17 items was prepared by the researcher. These items include: Age, Gender, Education, their level and awareness about Internet and social Media, various Social Networking Sites visited by them, Devices available to them, Duration and usage, Reason for using SNS and their views.

**PROCEDURE**

This study was conducted in rural area of district Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India. A questionnaire was given to them to find out their awareness of Internet and activity on Social Networking Sites. Chi square test and t-Test were applied to examine the experimental hypothesis.

**5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

**TABLE -1**  
 2/2 Table of Internet Users

	<b>USERS</b>	<b>NON- USERS</b>	
<b>Rural Youth</b>	332	468	<b>800</b>
	54	746	<b>800</b>

N=800

According to national survey 6.75% rural population is internet active. (Exhibit-1) This study concludes that 41.5% of college going youth of Azamgarh is Internet active which is very high in comparison to general rural population and to support it chi square had been calculated. (Table-1) 65.61 value of chi square is significant at .01 level also confirms this view that internet active youth of Azamgarh do not go in line with national findings. It is far more active on internet. Therefore investigator rejects the null hypothesis and safely concludes that youth of Azamgarh is more internet active than general rural population.

**TABLE -2** t- Table

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t VALUE</b>	<b>LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE</b>
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BOYS	226	26.55	8.93	2.27	Significant at 0.05 level but not significant at 0.01 level
GIRLS	106	23.94	10.36	“	“

Table-2 shows Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of boys and girls. t-value of 2.27 is significant at .05 level, but it is not significant at .01 level. Therefore data supports the experimental hypothesis up to some extent which indicates that there is a difference between male and female Social Networking Sites usage. It can be inferred from the data that male SNS users are more active than female SNS users.

Table-2 also draws attention to the fact, number of male SNS users (226) are more than double of female SNS users (106).

## 6. CONCLUSION:

Researcher can safely conclude that rural college going males are more active on social networking sites in compared to female. As the result is not highly significant researcher feels the need for a study on large sample from a broader area. There is one more interesting fact that has been observed by the researcher that most of the subjects were using laptops and PC literacy was high this could be because of free distribution of laptops to all the students in the year 2012 by state government.

It can also be concluded that rural college going youth as compared to general rural population is more aware of internet and there is some significant gender difference in male and female SNS usage. All rural college going youth who are Internet users are also active on SNS and Facebook is most popular among them. Most popular SNS among rural youth is FaceBook. Least popular among the male is LinkedIn and among female is MySpace.

## FUTURE IMPLICATION:

It is a pilot study which was conducted to examine the efficacy of IMRB International and IAMAI reports and help the government to improve the participation of rural youth in this form of communication which has huge potential to enable social change.

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