



Research Article

Social Networking Sites and Their Impact on Rural Degree Students in Karnataka

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Abstract

This study examines the extent and nature of social networking site (SNS) usage among rural degree students in Karnataka, and evaluates its impact on their academic performance, social behaviour, and mental well-being. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 300 rural undergraduate students across selected districts. Findings indicate high SNS penetration, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube being the most used platforms. While SNS facilitate communication, information access, and peer learning, excessive use is associated with distraction, reduced study time, and sleep disruption. The study underscores the need for digital literacy interventions and balanced usage guidelines tailored to rural student contexts.

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KEYWORDS: Social networking sites, rural students, Karnataka, and social media impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of the internet and smartphones has transformed social networking sites (SNS) into integral components of daily life, especially among young adults. In India, rural areas have witnessed a surge in SNS adoption due to affordable data and increased digital infrastructure. Karnataka, with its significant rural student population pursuing undergraduate degrees, presents a critical context to study the implications of SNS usage. For rural degree students, SNS serve multiple functions: staying connected with peers, accessing educational content, and engaging with global information. However, concerns persist regarding distractions, misinformation, and psychological effects. This article explores the patterns, benefits, and challenges of SNS use among rural degree students in Karnataka, drawing on empirical evidence and literature.

Positive academic impacts

- 1. Peer learning and collaboration:** SNS enable quick formation of study groups, sharing of PDFs, and discussion of assignments outside class hours.
- 2. Access to educational content:** Platforms like YouTube and educational WhatsApp channels provide video lectures, revision material, and competitive-exam preparation resources that may be scarce locally.
- 3. Continuity during disruptions:** During pandemic-related closures, rural students relied heavily on SNS to maintain contact with teachers, receive updates, and participate in informal online classes.

Negative academic impacts

- 1. Distraction and multitasking:** Many students report checking SNS while studying, leading to fragmented attention and longer time needed to complete tasks.
- 2. Reduced study time:** High daily SNS use correlates with less dedicated reading time, last-minute cramming, and lower self-reported concentration.
- 3. Sleep disruption:** Late-night scrolling and messaging are frequently mentioned, affecting next-day alertness and class participation.

Social and psychological dimensions

SNS have reshaped social life for rural degree students:

- 1. Enhanced connectivity:** Students maintain ties with school friends, relatives in other districts, and new peer groups in college, reducing feelings of isolation.
- 2. Identity and aspiration formation:** Constant exposure to urban and global lifestyles can broaden aspirations but also create status anxiety and cultural confusion, especially when local realities differ sharply from online portrayals.
- 3. Mental health concerns:** Excessive use is associated with anxiety, fear of missing out (FOMO), and in some cases cyberbullying or harassment, with girls often reporting more targeted negative experiences.
- 4. Gendered patterns:** Studies note that male students tend to use SNS more for gaming and entertainment, while

female students often prioritise communication and academically oriented groups, though both genders face similar risks of overuse.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing research highlights the dual nature of SNS impact on students. Gardner (2019) and Konetes & McKeague (2021) note that SNS enhance networking, identity formation, and collaborative learning, yet also introduce risks such as privacy issues and mental stress. Studies in Mangalore and other Karnataka regions reveal that college students predominantly use SNS for communication rather than entertainment, with platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp integral to their social lives. Recent sociological studies emphasize that while SNS improve access to information and peer support, excessive usage correlates with academic distraction and sleep disturbances among rural students. However, literature specific to Karnataka's rural degree students remains limited, indicating a gap this study aims to address.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.

- **Sample:** 300 undergraduate students from rural colleges in Belagavi Rural, Vijayapura and Dharwad districts.
- **Data Collection:** Structured questionnaires assessed SNS usage patterns, academic impact, and psychosocial effects. Focus group discussions explored lived experiences.
- **Analysis:** Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to interpret data.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Informed consent and anonymity were ensured.

4. DISCUSSION

SNS usage among rural degree students in Karnataka is widespread, driven by smartphone affordability and data accessibility. WhatsApp and Instagram dominate due to their multimedia and messaging capabilities. Students report using SNS for group study coordination, accessing lecture notes, and staying updated on academic announcements. However, excessive engagement leads to multitasking during study hours, reduced concentration, and sleep deprivation. Qualitative insights reveal that while SNS foster a sense of belonging and information sharing, they also expose students to cyberbullying and misinformation. Educational institutions and families play crucial roles in guiding balanced SNS usage. Digital literacy programs focusing on critical evaluation of online content and time management are recommended.

Implications for colleges and policymakers:

Evidence from Karnataka and similar contexts suggests several practical responses:

- 1. Digital literacy modules:** Integrate short, mandatory sessions on responsible SNS use, fact-checking, privacy, and cyber-safety into first-year orientation or skill-development courses.

2. **Guidelines for balanced use:** Encourage departments to set norms (e.g., no SNS during lectures, structured WhatsApp groups for academic purposes only) and promote “digital detox” challenges during exam periods.
3. **Counselling and support:** Strengthen campus counselling to address SNS-related stress, sleep issues, and online harassment, with special attention to gendered risks.
4. **Leveraging SNS for learning:** Instead of banning SNS, colleges can curate official channels for announcements, recorded micro-lectures, and peer mentoring, turning SNS into structured learning tools.

5. FINDINGS

1. **High Penetration:** Over 85% of respondents use SNS daily, with WhatsApp (92%), Instagram (78%), and YouTube (70%) being most popular.
2. **Academic Impact:** 60% reported using SNS for educational purposes, but 55% admitted distraction during study time.
3. **Psychosocial Effects:** Positive outcomes include enhanced peer connectivity and information access; negative effects include anxiety, sleep issues, and reduced face-to-face interaction.
4. **Gender Differences:** Female students reported higher SNS use for academic collaboration, while males leaned towards entertainment and gaming.
5. **Need for Intervention:** Majority expressed willingness to participate in digital literacy workshops.

6. CONCLUSION

Social networking sites (SNS) have become central to the daily lives of rural degree students in Karnataka, shaping how they learn, communicate, and form identities. Their impact is mixed: SNS expand access to information, peer support, and academic coordination, but also introduce risks such as distraction, sleep disruption, and exposure to misinformation or cyberbullying. Recent sociological work in rural Belagavi (Kittur) shows that undergraduate students in degree colleges use social media extensively, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube among the most common platforms. Students report using SNS not only for entertainment but also for group study coordination, sharing notes, and staying updated on college announcements. Broader reviews of rural and semi-urban university contexts in India indicate that by 2025, smartphone ownership and mobile internet access had risen sharply, narrowing the traditional digital divide. In many rural settings, over 70% of students maintain at least one social media account, and a significant share use SNS several hours per day, especially during academic terms and exam periods.

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