Nexus Between Social Media and Social Isolation Among Urban and Rural Youth: A Comparative Study

ZoyaYaqub[1], Muhammad Idrees[2], Naveed Farah[3], Rao Sabir Sattar[4]

1 Ph.D. scholar, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad

2 Assistant Professor, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad

3 Associate Professor, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad

4 Assistant Professor, Institute of Agri. Extension, education and rural development, University of Agriculture Faisalabad

Corresponding Auhtor: Dr. Muhammad Idrees (dr.midrees@uaf.edu.pk)

ABSTRACT

Social media is very popular worldwide. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Snap chat remain popular choices for connecting with others, sharing content, and staying informed. The usage of social media and networking sites continues to evolve rapidly. It is influenced by various factors like technological advancements, cultural shifts, and global events. While social media platforms provide opportunities for connection and interaction, excessive or problematic usage may also contribute to feelings of social isolation. Excessive use or reliance on social media for social interaction may lead to feelings of loneliness or social isolation, especially if online connections do not adequately substitute for face-to-face interactions. Current study focuses on the connection between the excessive use of social media and perceived social isolation. Conversely, rural youth, who often face geographic and social constraints, may rely on social media as a vital tool for communication and social integration. Understanding these contrasting experiences is crucial in assessing the broader implications of social media on youth mental health and social well-being. It was a comparative study of rural and urban youth of Punjab and quantitative in nature. Sample was selected through multistage sampling technique. Three agricultural universities i.e. PMAS Arid Agriculture University, University of Agriculture Faisalabad and MNS-university of agriculture Multan was selected from north, central and south zones of Punjab, Pakistan through purposive sampling technique. A sample of 396 respondents (198 rural and 198 urban) was selected through Taro Yamini formula after getting the list of enrolled students from the selected universities at 5% error and 95% confidence interval. The equal proportion was selected due to the better comparative analysis. Well-structured questionnaire was used for collection of data. Collected data was analysed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Findings reveals that urban youth are expected to spend more time on social media due to greater internet accessibility and digital literacy. They may use social media for networking, entertainment, and self-presentation but may also experience negative outcomes. Youth may use social media primarily as a tool for maintaining long-distance friendships, overcoming geographic isolation, and accessing educational resources. The findings indicate that while social media can serve as a powerful tool for connectivity and information sharing, excessive and unregulated use can contribute to social isolation in both urban and rural contexts. Urban youth, with greater access to social media, may experience higher levels of social comparison, online peer pressure, and, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and

disconnection. Meanwhile, rural youth, despite using social media to overcome geographic barriers, may face additional isolation due to limited digital access and fewer online peer interactions. It was concluded that study provides a comparative analysis of social media usage and perceived social isolation among urban and rural youth, highlighting the differing challenges and experiences associated with digital interactions.

Key Words: Social isolation, Media, Social Media, SNS, Comparison, Rural and Urban, Youth

Introduction

Social media is defined as the gathering or aggregation of people with similar interests, such as online communities Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, Instagram and live journal. These communities bring likeminded people together and connect them by providing information about each person (Kim et al., 2020).

Social media usage and websites continues to increase rapidly under the influence of many factors such as advances in technology, cultural changes, and global events. Social media use covers many activities that individuals perform on social media platforms, including but not limited to creating and sharing content, interacting with others through comments and likes, following as a private account or page, and participating in online communities or chats (Duggan and Brenner, 2013).

Social interactions have evolved as a result of social media and social networking (McFarland and Ployhart, 2015). Social media is used by people to build and preserve relationships (Brandtzaeg and Heim, 2009). Advertising is very popular around the world. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Snap Chat continue to be popular options for connecting with others, sharing content and keeping up with the latest news. However, the ways people use these platforms vary (Statista, 2022).

These platforms can be defined as visuals such as Instagram, Snap Chat or social media such as Facebook and Twitter. These websites facilitate communication through instant communication making it easier to develop and maintain relationship (Pittman and Reich, 2016).

Loneliness and social isolation is an important topic in science education and has many meanings. It can be interpreted as a loss of personal relationships or a conflict arising from the social institutions of the relationship. Social isolation means having good relationships and little contact with these people (Masoom, 2016).

Social isolation is linked to a lack of communication or social interaction. Avoiding or withdrawing from social circumstances (Delelis and Christophe, 2018).

Perceived social isolation refers to a person's experience of feeling isolated from social interactions even when surrounded by others. It can lead to loneliness, conflict, or lack of belonging even in social relationships. This feeling can have a psychological and physical impact on a person's health. Perceived social isolation refers to one's evaluation of feelings of social isolation or loneliness, regardless of the actual value or quality of the relationship. It affects ineffective connection and association that can harm the mind and body (Cacioppo, 2014).

While social media platforms provide opportunities for connection and interaction, excessive or problematic usage may also contribute to feelings of social isolation. Social media can enhance social connectivity by facilitating communication and maintaining relationships over long distances. However, excessive use or reliance on social media for social interaction may lead to feelings of loneliness or social isolation, especially if online connections do not adequately substitute for face-to-face interactions. Excessive use of social media may displace time spent on offline social activities. Excessive use of media caused sense of disconnection of people from the real world relationship and reduced the direct or face to face interaction with others. This displacement effect can contribute to social isolation, particularly if online interactions fail to fulfil individuals' need for genuine human connection (Primack et al., 2017).

Social isolation and usage of social media's effect on youth are complex and multifaceted, influencing various aspects of their development, mental health, and well-being. Social isolation and excessive media usage affect the mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem among youth. Lack of meaningful social connections and constant exposure to unrealistic standards and negative content on social media platforms can exacerbate these problems. Youth who experience social isolation may be more vulnerable to cyberbullying and online victimization, as they may seek validation and connection through online interactions. Cyberbullying can have profound psychological effects on victims, leading to feelings of loneliness, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Twenge and Campbell, 2018).

Cacioppo and Hawkley (2003) concluded that individuals those are lonelier have higher risks of health problems as compared to those are less likely to alone and isolated. Social isolation and loneliness had adverse effects on health. It effects the physical and mental health as well.

Significance of the Study:

As social media sites continue to grow daily and technology is vital to today's youth life. Usage of social media is increasing day by day and primarily social media is blamed for increasing social isolation among youth. Meyer said that advance technology and social networking sites like mobile phone, internet and social media play vital role to set this trend. He concluded that internet, mobile phones and social media is one of the major factor that pulls away people from their family life, neighborhood, traditional social settings and social or voluntary association, publics spaces interactions that have been connected and associated with the large core social networks (Meyer, 2021).

Pakistan has a strong traditional family system but social media change the pattern of social interaction and create a digital divide between two generations. Social media offering new ways of social interaction instead of traditional pattern that effects the family life also. Pakistan is the country of young generation. The use of social media and technology is quite evident in the lives of young people today. It is estimate that young people between the ages of 18-24 send and receive more than 100 text messages per day approximately, 3,200 per month (Qureshi, 2022).

According to Gosling mostly universities and college students used social media because they have easily access and more opportunities to use internet as compare to other youngster who have not. Therefore, there is a need to understand how Pakistani university students use social media platforms and a systematic way of research is required to explore the facts (Gosling and Graham, 2012).

Objective

Objective of this study is to explore the relationship between social media usage and social isolation among rural and urban youth.

Theoretical Framework

Masoom (2016) says that social isolation is one of the key concepts in the social sciences, and it has a lot of different meanings. Loss of social relationships on a personal level or withdrawal from important social groups on a societal level are two ways to describe it. There are some similarities in how the theoretical framework operationalizes the idea of social isolation as a whole. However, different researchers have suggested that important indicators should be found through empirical studies. One big question is whether objective indicators should be used to measure the economic and social situation of the target group, or whether the focus should be on the kinds of relationships that people have with each other. The study looks at different ways to measure social isolation in order to find the most useful meaning among the many that are available. Social isolation is a fundamental theme in the exploration of the human condition throughout cultures experiencing significant industrialization and urbanization. This paper examines the concept of 'social isolation' across many disciplines within the social sciences.

Social isolation is regarded as a risk factor in the development of the social situation. The absence of appropriate social relationships is the fundamental cause of social isolation. The contemporary man is being fragmented, recalcitrant, and diminished by a complex matrix of social forces, including the increasing number of high-definition automobiles, bureaucratization, and advancements in living conditions. Consequently, he is being isolated from the society in which he is a member. The socially isolated individual is one who perceives that he or she has little or no control over socio-political events and is unable to assert himself as a subject to modify his or her situation. Theories and research on the observed social isolation of the disadvantaged have been comparatively diverse and have frequently been impeded by ethnocentric perspectives, as well as by some inarticulate and unverified indicators. However, the phenomenon has been illuminated by the multidisciplinary efforts of sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and historians, who have significantly contributed to the development of a theoretical framework and have provided valuable guidance in empirical studies. Social isolation can be interpreted as a sign that the individual's interpersonal issues have become so severe that they have impeded their ability to engage in interpersonal relationships. This is a collection of issues that stem from a sense of disengagement, which in turn leads to interpersonal challenges and ultimately,

interpersonal incompetence. It is regarded as symptoms of a dysfunctional society in which ethical structures have either collapsed or become meaningless (Durkhiem, 1997).

In disconnected, disengaged, peripatetic, and rootless societies, the advancement of science and technology frequently led to the development of "anomie," which is characterized by ethical and social isolation (Durkhiem, 1997). Alienation will result in complete isolation in industrialized societies (Marks, 2018). Urban life was characterized by a focus on daily interactions rather than long-term relationships, which led to "impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental" interactions. This environment also fostered "reserve, indifference, and a blasé outlook," which individuals employed to "immunize" themselves against the expectations of others. As a result, the sole means of communication was the selfish utilization of interpersonal contacts (Louis 2019).
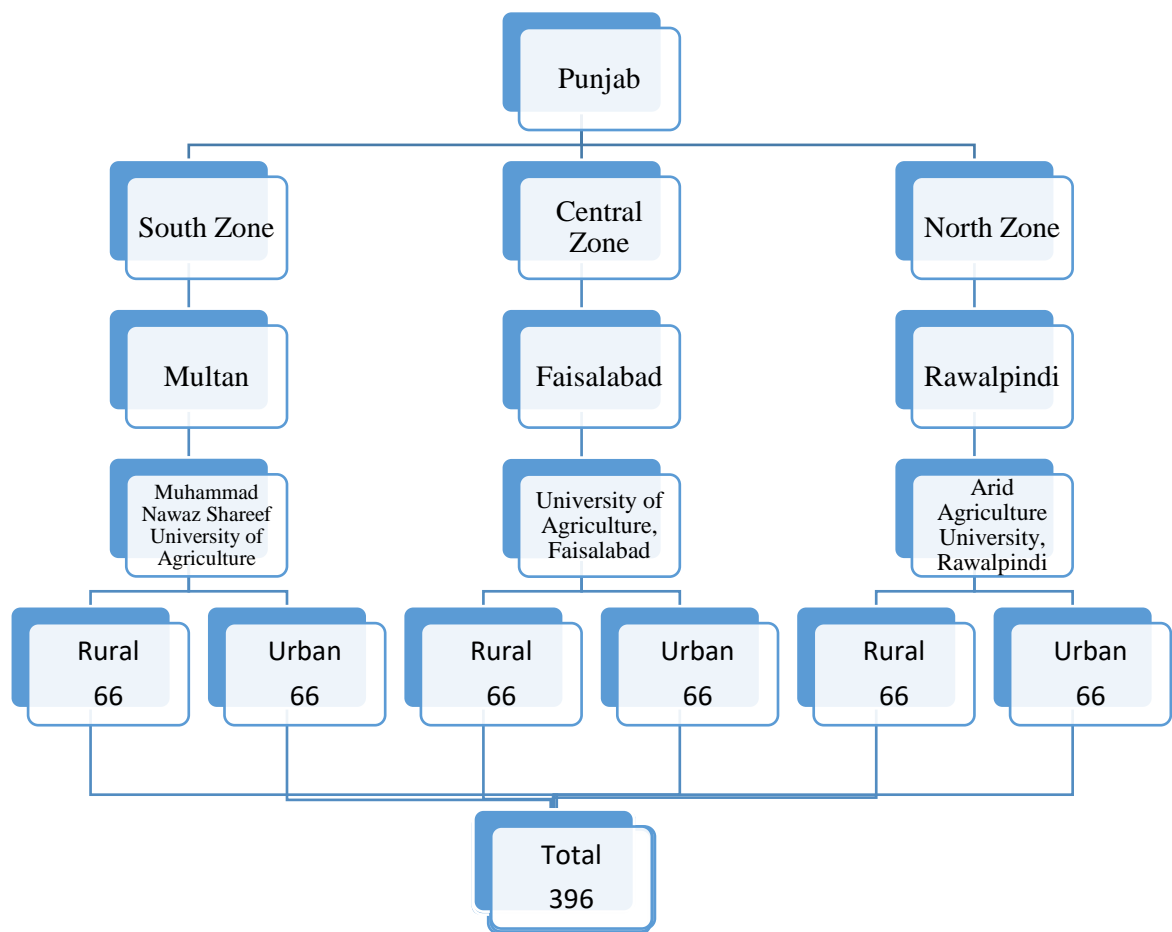
Social isolation aggravates the consequences of being concentrated in very poor areas since it limits the possibilities of inner-city dwellers solely to those found in their socially disadvantaged communities. Cut off from mainstream society, underclass people lack access to job networks and exposure to traditional role models such as stably employed adults and to marriageable couples (Wilson, 2018). Though there is a lot of social media now, which people can build relationships, the degree of confidence on social relations dropped. This is especially true in view of the changes in core network architecture (McPherson *et al*., 2006). A group of people that live apart from the mainstream culture are more likely to experience an anomaly. Moreover, the financial circumstances of the neighbor helped to determine the degree of anomie that person has (Bell, 2021).

According to Pitirim Sorokin, social isolation is more noticeable among those who have migrated from various social conditions and find themselves unable to create decent personal interactions in new surroundings especially because they sense rootlessness. He spoke on the harmful as well as the positive effects of such solitude almost a century ago. Although in Sorokin's words "diminishes intimacy and enhances psychosocial isolation and loneliness" (Sorokin. 1927), he notes that this mobility increases creativity and adaptability of the isolates".

Methodology

Research technique refers to the actions taken to collect data in a systematic manner in order to answer a research topic. This is a summary of the data gathered and how the research data was interpreted. It describes an established set of methods for generating scientific knowledge, confirming observations, analysing data, and extrapolating findings (Bouchrika, 2023). For analysing sociological problems methodology techniques are very important. A perfect methodology plays a vital role and has important to create a series of knowledge and practical verification of the hypothesis. Methodology explains various tools used for conducting research (Andrews, 2019).

It was a comparative study of rural and urban youth of Punjab and quantitative in nature. Sample was selected through multistage sampling technique. Three agricultural universities i.e. PMAS Arid Agriculture University, University of Agriculture Faisalabad and MNS-university of agriculture Multan was selected from north, central and south zones of Punjab, Pakistan through purposive sampling technique. This study employed a multi-phase sampling method, as it is an appropriate strategy for sampling large populations when time and resources are limited. In multiphase sampling, sample selection is conducted in two or more steps. The nature of the sampling technique differs at each stage, with the last phase providing researchers with the critical sample or unit of analysis. During the preliminary sampling, 3 geographical Zones of Punjab (South Zone, Central Zone and North Zone) was selected. At 2nd stage 1 Public Sector Agricultural University from each District was selected purposively. From South Zone Mian Muhammad Nawaz Shareef University of Agriculture, Multan, from Central Zone University of Agriculture, Faisalabad and Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi from North Zone was selected. At final stage a sample of396 (198 rural and 198 urban) respondents has been selected through Taro Yamini formula after getting the list of enrolled students from the selected universities. For the purpose of comparison heterogeneous population of rural and urban youth has divided into the homogeneous strata, than researcher selected 66 respondents from each strata through stratified disproportionate sampling technique that provide the equal number of sample.

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Moreover, Well-structured questionnaire was used for collection of data. Collected data was analysed by using SPSS.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis and interpretation are the fundamental aspect of research. In the absence of these processes, generalization and prediction, the objectives of scientific study, cannot be realized. Generalizations and inferences are derived from the traits and attitudes of the respondents. The objective of the results and discussion section is to analyses and interpret data pertinent to research issues. Parallel analysis evaluates all variables within a specific data set. It delineates various reaction patterns. This variable delineates its unique characteristics. Statistics delineate and encapsulate data.

Hypothesis 1: Higher social media usage is associated with increased perceived social isolation among urban youth

Table 1: Association between Social Media Usage and Perceived Social Isolation (Urban vs. Rural Youth)

Group	N	Mean		Correlation	T-Value	Degree of Freedom	P. Value
		Social Media	Social isolation				
Urban	198	4.5	5.2	0.45	7.12	394	0.001
Rural	198	3.2	4.1	0.18	2.56	394	0.011

Table depicts that Urban and rural youth are the two groups being compared. Each group has 198 participants, totaling 396. The average social media usage score for each group. Urban youth have a higher mean (4.5) compared to rural youth (3.2). The average perceived social isolation score for each group. Urban youth report higher perceived social isolation (5.2) compared to rural youth (4.1). The Pearson correlation coefficient between social media usage and perceived social isolation. Urban youth show a stronger positive correlation ($r = 0.45$) compared to rural youth ($r = 0.18$). The calculated T-statistic for testing the significance of the correlation. Urban youth have a higher T-value (7.12) compared to rural youth (2.56). The p-value indicates the significance of the correlation. For urban youth, the p-value (< 0.001) suggests a highly significant positive correlation, while for rural youth, the p-value (0.011) suggests a weaker but still significant correlation. The results support the hypothesis that higher social media usage is positively correlated with increased perceived social isolation, particularly among urban youth. Urban youth exhibit a stronger relationship between these variables compared to rural youth, suggesting that the impact of social media usage on perceived social isolation may vary by geographic context. Beere*et al*. (2019) indicate that individuals residing in rural locations frequently report lower levels of loneliness compared to those in metropolitan settings. Rural youth endure greater social isolation than their urban counterparts, resulting in heightened susceptibility to loneliness (MacDonald *et*

al., 2020). Increased vulnerability to social isolation, limited access to healthcare, and poorer mental health outcomes in rural areas provide substantial challenges for rural kids. Despite equivalent frequency, rural areas exhibit poorer mental health outcomes compared to urban areas, resulting in more debilitating and socially isolated manifestations of mental health illnesses (Perkins *et al*., 2019). Van *et al*. (2019) examined the correlation between mental health concerns and heightened perceptions of loneliness, attributing this phenomenon to a diminished capacity for social interaction, which can consequently be considered a factor of social isolation if sufficiently debilitating.

Social media usage has significantly altered the way individuals interact, but it has also been linked to increased social isolation. While platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter provide opportunities for connection, excessive use can lead to decreased face-to-face interactions and feelings of loneliness. Studies have shown that individuals who spend more time on social media report higher levels of perceived social isolation compared to those who engage less frequently (Primack, 2017). Moreover, the curated nature of social media content can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. Users often compare themselves to idealized portrayals of others, leading to negative self-perceptions and emotional withdrawal from real-world relationships (Twenge, 2018). As a result, individuals may become more isolated despite being constantly connected online. This phenomenon highlights the importance of balanced social media use, emphasizing genuine social interactions rather than digital engagement alone.

Hypothesis 2: Higher sharing on social media dimension is associated with higher perceived social isolation among urban and rural youth

Table 2: Correlation between sharing on Social Media and Social Isolation (Urban vs. Rural Youth)

Group	N	Mean Social Media	Mean Social isolation	Correlation	T-Value	Degree of Freedom	P. Value

Urban	198	5.3	6.1	0.52	8.45	394	0.001
Rural	198	4.0	5.0	0.25	3.62	394	0.001

The average score for sharing behavior on social media. Urban youth have a higher mean (5.3) compared to rural youth (4.0). The average perceived social isolation score. Urban youth report higher perceived social isolation (6.1) compared to rural youth (5.0). The Pearson correlation coefficient between sharing on social media and perceived social isolation. Urban youth show a stronger positive correlation (r = 0.52) compared to rural youth (r = 0.25). The calculated T-statistic for testing the significance of the correlation. Urban youth have a higher T-value (8.45) compared to rural youth (3.62). The p-value indicates the significance of the correlation. For both urban and rural youth, the p-value (< 0.001) suggests a statistically significant positive correlation.

This indicates that the relationship exists but is less pronounced compared to urban youth. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The results support the hypothesis that higher sharing on social media is associated with higher perceived social isolation among both urban and rural youth. However, the association is stronger among urban youth, suggesting that the impact of sharing behavior on social media may vary by geographic context. The survey reveals that Pakistani students often utilise social media to seek and disseminate information regarding social issues, politics, sports, fashion, religion, and academics. These results align with prior student studies conducted both nationally and internationally. Moreover, these data challenge the prevalent assumption that college students allocate their time to social media. Contemporary societies have evolved due to the advent of social networking platforms that provide users with unrestricted access to information. It is noteworthy that adolescents exhibit a greater inclination towards utilising social networking platforms for educational purposes compared to other technological modalities (Kim *et al*., 2011). Facebook is globally recognised by regular users as a medium for information retrieval and sharing (Ahmad *et al*., 2016).

Research indicates that students from both urban and rural areas actively seek and share information on social media, though their patterns of usage differ due to digital access and

socio-economic factors. Urban students, with better internet facilities and digital literacy, are more likely to engage in diverse information-sharing activities, including academic discussions, news updates, and professional networking (Kumar & Sharma, 2021). In contrast, rural students primarily use social media for basic information-seeking, such as educational resources and local news, often constrained by limited connectivity and fewer digital skills (Patel *et al*., 2020). Studies suggest that while urban students contribute more actively to knowledge-sharing forums and online discussions, rural students rely more on passive consumption of shared content (Singh & Verma, 2019). However, with the expansion of digital literacy programs and internet accessibility, the gap in social media usage for information exchange between rural and urban students is gradually decreasing.

Hypothesis 3: Effects of different social media plat form on the perceived social isolation differs significantly between urban and rural youth

Table 3: Effects of different Social Media platforms and Perceived Social Isolation (Urban vs. Rural Youth)

Group	N	Mean Social Media	Mean Social isolation	Correlation	T-Value	Degree of Freedom	P. Value
Urban	198	5.8	7.2	0.81	5.47	394	0.000
Rural	198	4.5	3.1	0.32	4.31	394	0.001

Table depicts that the average perceived social isolation score for users of each platform. Urban youth consistently report higher perceived social isolation across all platforms. Measures the variability in perceived social isolation scores within each group. The calculated T-statistic for comparing the means of urban and rural youth for each platform. The p-value indicates the significance of the difference between urban and rural youth for each platform. A p-value < 0.05 indicates a statistically significant difference. The results suggest that the effects of different social media platforms on perceived social isolation differ significantly between urban and rural youth. Urban youth consistently report higher levels of perceived social isolation across all platforms compared to rural youth. This indicates that

geographic context (urban vs. rural) may moderate the relationship between social media use and perceived social isolation. So, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Social media platforms have become an essential part of daily life, influencing communication, entertainment, education, and business. While various platforms serve different purposes, some have gained immense popularity due to their user-friendly features, widespread adoption, and adaptability to diverse content formats. This review examines the most frequently used social media platforms worldwide, highlighting their purpose, demographics, and influence. Facebook remains one of the most widely used social media platforms, with over 2.9 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2023). Popular among all age groups**,** though younger users are shifting toward visual-based platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Jones *et al*., 2021). YouTube is the most widely used video-sharing platform, with over 2.5 billion users (Google Trends, 2023). Instagram has gained popularity for its visual-based content**,** attracting over 2 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2023).Instagram is widely used for brand promotion, fashion, fitness, and travel content (Kaur & Gupta, 2023). TikTok has rapidly grown in popularity, boasting over 1.7 billion users (DataReportal, 2023). Primarily used for short-form video content, viral challenges, and entertainment (Hussain & Brown, 2022). LinkedIn is the leading platform for professional networking**,** with over 900 million users(LinkedIn, 2023).

According to statistics, people in cities and rural areas share vastly different types of content on social media. The cultural norm of openness in urban regions, increased comfort with digital platforms, or higher trust in online privacy regulations could all be contributing factors. Rural respondents, on the other hand, are less inclined to disclose other types of personal information but more likely to share personal photographs. In rural areas, this could indicate that people prefer to exchange visual content over written or descriptive content. A more cautious approach to exposing personal information online or concerns about privacy could be to blame. Because urbanites are more inclined to share their relationship status and political beliefs, they can use social media to express themselves and campaign for causes they support. On the other hand, those living in rural areas may be more likely to share visual content (such as personal photographs) as a way to interact with others without disclosing too much personal information. To determine how representative the data is, you must know the

total sample size, which is not provided in the table. Without these data, it is difficult to extrapolate the findings to the general population.

The study did not investigate why people share or do not share specific types of data. The respondents' goals and concerns could be better understood through qualitative research. Age, gender, education, and financial status are some of the variables that can influence how people share knowledge. These characteristics could be the focus of future research aimed at closing the gap between rural and urban populations. The data does not specify which platforms were used or how respondents' privacy settings were setup. This background knowledge may help you better understand the results. Research on the links between information-sharing practices and outcomes such as privacy concerns, social connectedness, and online safety may be in the works.

Research on social media usage among students from urban and rural areas highlights notable differences in access, engagement, profile information and content sharing. Urban students, benefiting from better internet infrastructure, frequently use social media for academic collaboration, networking, and entertainment, and share age, gender, date of birth and affiliation, whereas rural students face challenges such as limited connectivity and digital literacy gaps and they share less (Kumar & Sharma, 2022). Studies indicate that urban students are more likely to engage in diverse content creation, while rural students primarily use social media for communication and information gathering (Patel *et al*., 2021). Despite these differences, social media serves as a critical platform for students from both backgrounds to express opinions, share experiences, and access educational resources (Singh & Verma, 2020). However, disparities in digital access continue to influence the nature and extent of their online participation.

Conclusion

This study contributed to the growing discourse on the psychological and social implications of social media use, particularly in different geographical contexts. By comparing the experiences of urban and rural youth, the research will provide a nuanced understanding of how digital engagement affects perceived social isolation. The insights gained will be valuable in shaping policies and interventions aimed at fostering healthier social media habits, ultimately improving the social and emotional well-being of young individuals in both urban and rural settings. Through a balanced approach to digital interactions, youth can harness the benefits of social media while minimizing its potential drawbacks, leading to a more connected and emotionally resilient generation.

It was concluded that study provides a comparative analysis of social media usage and perceived social isolation among urban and rural youth, highlighting the differing challenges and experiences associated with digital interactions. The findings indicate that while social media can serve as a powerful tool for connectivity and information sharing, excessive and unregulated use can contribute to social isolation in both urban and rural contexts.

Urban youth, with greater access to social media, may experience higher levels of social comparison, online peer pressure, and FOMO, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Meanwhile, rural youth, despite using social media to overcome geographic barriers, may face additional isolation due to limited digital access and fewer online peer interactions.

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