

ABSTRACT

Social networking sites have gained prominence as powerful digital platforms that have crucial influence on the social, emotional and scholastic development of youth. Social networking platforms have become necessary tools for communication, education and career development. This present study aims to explore the knowledge, attitude and usage patterns of social networking among youth from rural and urban settings, in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. The research incorporates a mixed method design that incorporates quantitative and qualitative approaches based on interview, case studies and awareness programmes. To assess the effectiveness of awareness initiatives, pre test and post test assessments were conducted to measure changes identified in respondents understanding. Among the 600 sample, from student youth and employed youth, 150 samples were fragmented from the rural student youth and 150 samples from rural employed youth. Similarly, 150 samples were selected among urban student youth and 150 from urban employed youth. Among rural student youth, 89 percent demonstrate adequate knowledge of Facebook, 76 percent were capable of profile creation and 88 percent used these platforms primarily for communication. Furthermore, 84 percent recognized social networking as a source of knowledge development and 64 percent employed it for educational purposes. The study also revealed that 87 percent of rural youth reported improvement in language proficiency, 73 percent in personal calibre and 83 percent in photography and creative skills. Meanwhile, 81 percent refrained from chatting with strangers. Among urban youth, a higher proportion 61 percent spend time on online games, whereas 79 percent of employed youth believed that social networking has enhanced their employment opportunities. The analysis highlights a vital association between the location of youth and their levels of social networking knowledge, emotional and behavioural responses and overall attitudes. The findings affirmed that potential of social networking sites to promote youth empowerment and socio economic development. The study concluded that structured education and awareness programmes can guide youth toward responsible, productive and balanced use of social networking. Furthermore, the increasing internet accessibility in rural regions is helping bridge the digital divide, facilitating equal participation in the nation's development process. The study faced challenges due to COVID-19-related restrictions, which constrained fieldwork, participant interaction, and the inclusion of respondents beyond one district and age group.

Key words: Youth, Social Networking, Rural Students, Rural Employed, Urban Students, Urban Employed,