

# Exploring Social Media Engagement among Rural Adolescent Girls in Andhra Pradesh

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**ABSTRACT:** *The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed how adolescents communicate, learn, and interact, including in rural areas. This study explores social media usage among 400 adolescent girls (ages 17–19) in rural Andhra Pradesh, examining patterns, influences, and behaviors. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected through structured interviews and focused group discussions, with additional secondary data from Anganwadi Centres and official records. Findings reveal that peers play the dominant role in encouraging social media participation, although nearly half of the girls create their own accounts, reflecting growing digital autonomy. WhatsApp and YouTube emerge as the most frequently used platforms, primarily for educational purposes and entertainment. Most respondents access social media via personal or parents' mobile devices, with peak usage occurring in the evening and before sleep. While social media supports learning and social engagement, extensive use raises concerns regarding privacy, wellbeing, and potential exposure to online risks. The study underscores the need for targeted digital literacy programs and safe usage interventions that consider peer influence, family dynamics, and device access, aiming to promote responsible, educational, and empowering engagement with social media among rural adolescent girls.*

**KEYWORDS** – Social Media, Adolescent Girls, Rural, Women Studies, Andhra Pradesh

## I. Introduction

The rapid spread of digital technologies has changed the way young people communicate, learn, and interact with each other. While most research on social media has focused on urban adolescents, there is increasing evidence that rural communities are also becoming active participants in digital spaces, bringing with them distinct usage patterns and challenges. In rural Andhra Pradesh, adolescent girls are exploring social media within the context of local socio-cultural norms, limited access to digital infrastructure, and varying degrees of parental supervision. Understanding how they engage online is important because, while social media offers opportunities for learning and social connection, it also exposes them to risks such as online harassment, misleading information, and excessive usage.

This study looks closely at the patterns, influences, and behaviors surrounding social media use among adolescent girls in rural settings. It examines who plays a role in creating social media accounts, the platforms they prefer, how often and how long they use them, the devices they access, and the reasons behind their engagement. By doing so, the research provides a comprehensive picture of how rural adolescent girls experience social media.

These findings are important for designing programs that promote digital literacy, awareness, and safe, positive online practices tailored to the needs of young girls in rural communities.

## II. Objectives

- To understand how adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh use social media, looking at which platforms they prefer, the devices they access them on, and how often and how long they spend online.
- To explore what drives their social media use, including the influence of friends, family, and their own personal motivations for creating and using accounts.
- To identify both the benefits and challenges of social media use for these girls, with the aim of supporting safe, meaningful, and empowering online experiences.

## III. Research Methodology and sampling

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the patterns, influences, and impact of social media use among adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh. The research focused on identifying types of social media platforms used, frequency and duration of usage, device access, and the effects on daily life. The study was conducted across the four administrative zones of Andhra Pradesh, covering 26 districts, and employed a multi-stage simple random sampling method. One district from each zone was randomly selected, followed by the random selection of a block and a village panchayat.

From these areas, a total of 400 adolescent girls aged 17–19 years were surveyed, with 100 respondents from each zone. Data were collected using structured interview schedules, which included four sections covering demographic and socio-economic characteristics, social media usage patterns, its impact on routine life, and threats or challenges faced. The interview schedules were prepared in the local language, pre-tested with 20 respondents, and refined based on field challenges. Secondary data on adolescent populations and administrative divisions were obtained from Anganwadi Centres, government records, journals, books, and online sources. In addition, focused group discussions were conducted using a standard checklist to gain deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of the respondents.

## IV. Data analysis interpretation

### 4.1. Demography of respondents

The age distribution of adolescent girls in the study reveals that the majority (44 percent) of them fall into the late adolescence category (17–19 years), followed by 37 percent in middle adolescence (14–16 years), and only 19 percent in early adolescence (10–13 years). This skew towards older adolescents suggests a higher likelihood of social media exposure and usage, as previous studies indicate that the digital engagement tends to increase with age due to greater autonomy, peer influence, and access to mobile devices (Patil & Sawant, 2020).

Table – 1: Age

Types of adolescents	Frequency	Percent
10-13 Years: Early	77	19
14-16 Years: Middle	146	37
17-19 Years: Late	177	44
Total	400	100

#### 4.2. Factors Influencing the Creation of Social Media Accounts

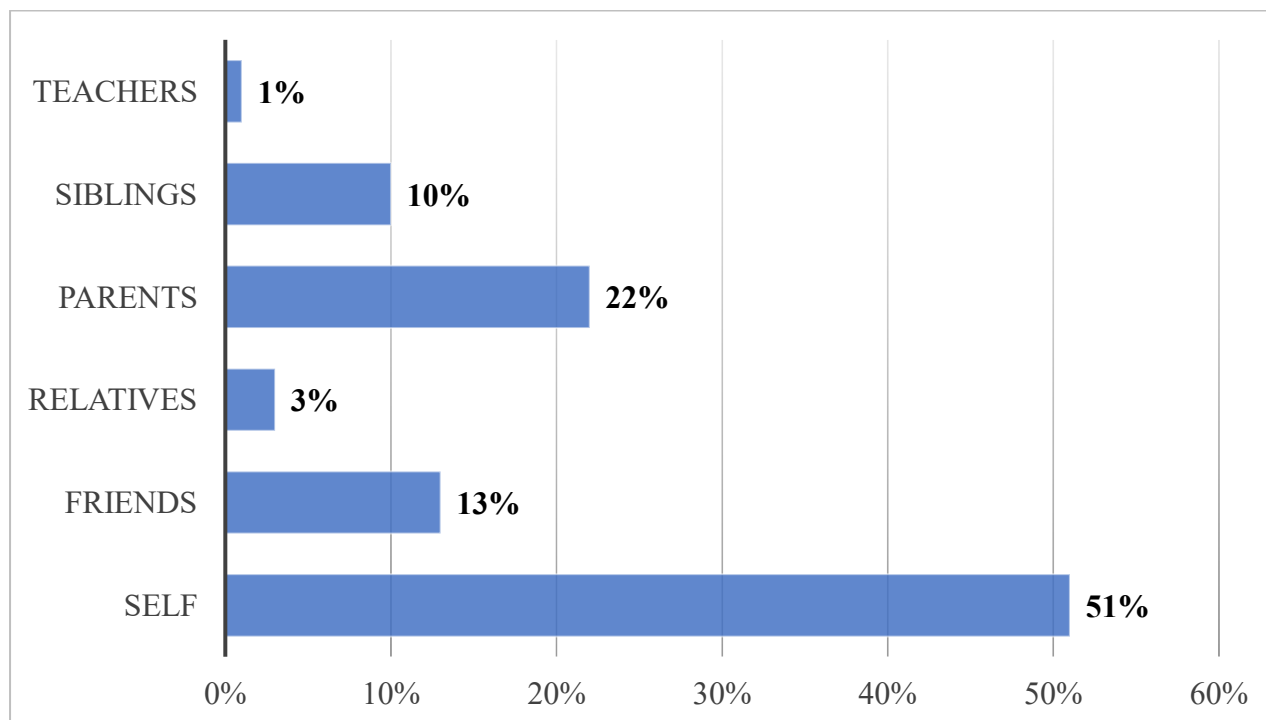
The data on influences behind social media account creation among adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh reveals that peers play a dominant role, with 72 percent reporting that friends influenced them to join social media platforms. This aligns with the broader literature on adolescent behavior, where peer influence is a critical driver of digital engagement, especially during the formative years of identity development and social belonging (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Interestingly, a significant number (44 percent) were self-motivated to create accounts, indicating increasing individual agency and digital curiosity. Parental influence (20 percent) and that of siblings (7 percent) were notably lower, while relatives (4 percent) and teachers (4 percent) had minimal impact. These findings suggest that while family and educational institutions may play a role in guiding digital behavior, adolescents in rural settings are primarily navigating social media entry through peer networks, which may amplify both positive and negative online experiences (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Understanding these influence patterns is crucial for designing peer-based digital literacy and safety interventions.

**Table – 2: Factors Influencing the Creation of Social Media Accounts**

Influencing	Yes		No		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Self	175	44	225	56	400	100
Friends	288	72	112	28	400	100
Relative	16	4	384	96	400	100
Parent	79	20	321	80	400	100
Sibling	28	7	372	93	400	100
Teacher	15	4	385	96	400	100

#### 4.3. Person Responsible for Creating the Social Media Account

**Figure - 1: Person Responsible for Creating the Social Media Account**



The data shows that a majority (51 percent) of adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh created their own social media accounts, reflecting a growing sense of digital autonomy and familiarity with technology among young users. Parents were responsible for account creation in 22 percent of cases, suggesting moderate parental involvement in introducing adolescents to online platforms. Meanwhile, friends (13 percent), siblings (10 percent), and relatives (3 percent) also played supportive roles in the account setup process, highlighting the influence of immediate social circles. Only 1 percent reported that teachers created their accounts, indicating limited formal institutional engagement in adolescents' digital initiation. These findings underscore that while adolescents are increasingly self-reliant in navigating the digital world, family and peers remain key facilitators in their online journeys (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). The high rate of self-created accounts also raises concerns about unmonitored exposure to online risks and reinforces the need for digital literacy programs that empower adolescent girls to use social media safely and responsibly (Boyd, 2014).

#### 4.4. First Social Media Platform Used

The data reveals that WhatsApp is the most common first social media platform among adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh, with 60 percent of respondents identifying it as their initial entry into the digital world. This preference likely stems from the platform's ease of use, low data consumption, and its widespread adoption in Indian households for communication (Banaji & Kumar, 2013). YouTube (17 percent) and Instagram (15 percent) follow as the next most common first platforms, reflecting a shift toward visual content and entertainment-driven engagement among younger users. In contrast, platforms like Facebook (3 percent), Snapchat (3 percent), and Telegram (1 percent) have relatively lower adoption as first accounts, while Twitter, LinkedIn, and ShareChat account for marginal shares. These patterns suggest that adolescent girls' early digital experiences are shaped more by peer and family communication needs and content consumption than by formal networking or news-oriented platforms. The dominance of mobile-friendly, informal platforms points to the importance of media literacy tailored to messaging and video-sharing apps, which serve as key gateways to the digital space in rural contexts (Kumar, 2020).

**Table – 3: First Social Media Platform Used**

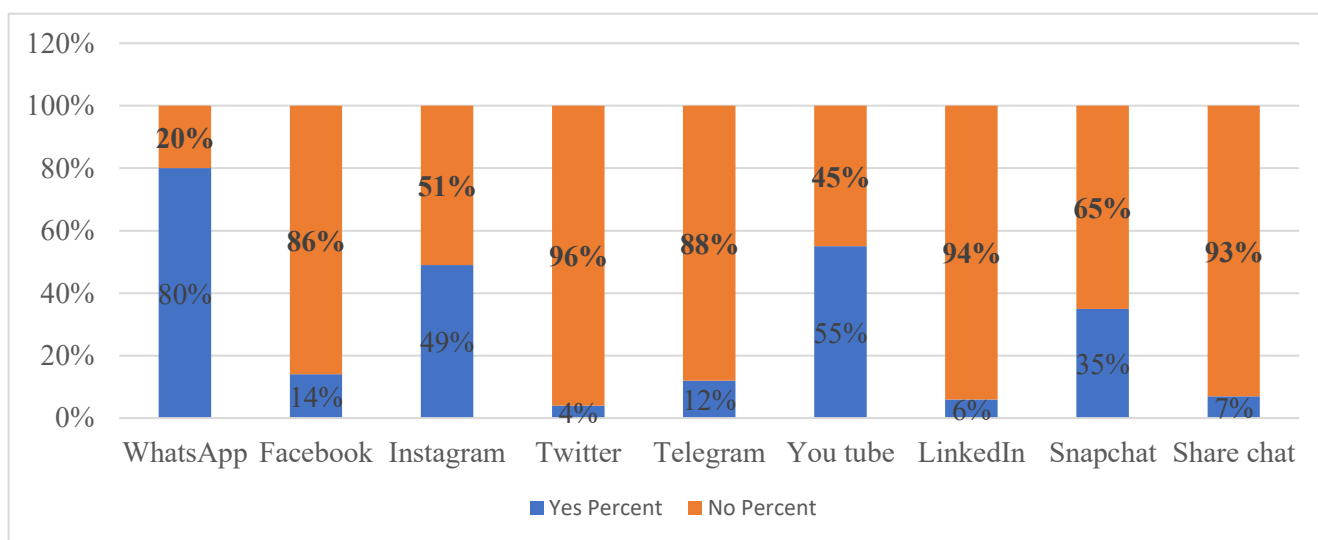
	Frequency	Percent
WhatsApp	241	60
Facebook	12	3
Instagram	61	15
Twitter	1	.3
Telegram	5	1
You Tube	66	17
LinkedIn	3	.8
Snapchat	10	3
Share chat	1	.3
Total	400	100

#### 4.5. Social Media Platforms Currently Used

The analysis of social media usage among adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh reveals a strong preference for communication and visual content platforms, with WhatsApp (80 percent) and YouTube (55 percent) being the most widely used. Instagram (49 percent) and Snapchat (35 percent) also show substantial engagement, indicating a strong inclination toward visually driven, socially interactive platforms that align with adolescent interests in peer connectivity and self-expression (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). In contrast, platforms like Facebook (14 percent), Twitter (4 percent), and LinkedIn (6 percent) have relatively lower usage, reflecting a generational shift away from text-heavy or professional-oriented platforms among younger users (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This pattern highlights the evolving digital behavior of adolescent girls, shaped by accessibility, peer trends, and

content preference. The popularity of certain platforms also suggests where interventions in digital literacy and online safety could be most effectively targeted to support the wellbeing and development of rural adolescent users.

Figure - 2: Social Media Platforms Currently Used



#### 4.6.Purpose of Social Media Use

Table – 4: Purpose of Social Media Use

Influencing	Yes		No		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Education	311	78	89	22	400	100
Entertainment	211	53	189	47	400	100
Connecting friends	92	23	308	77	400	100
Post reels	36	9	364	91	400	100
Status	38	10	362	90	400	100
Forced by friends	11	3	389	97	400	100
To know latest update	83	21	317	79	400	100
Earn money	9	2	391	98	400	100
Follow Celebrities	16	4	384	96	400	100

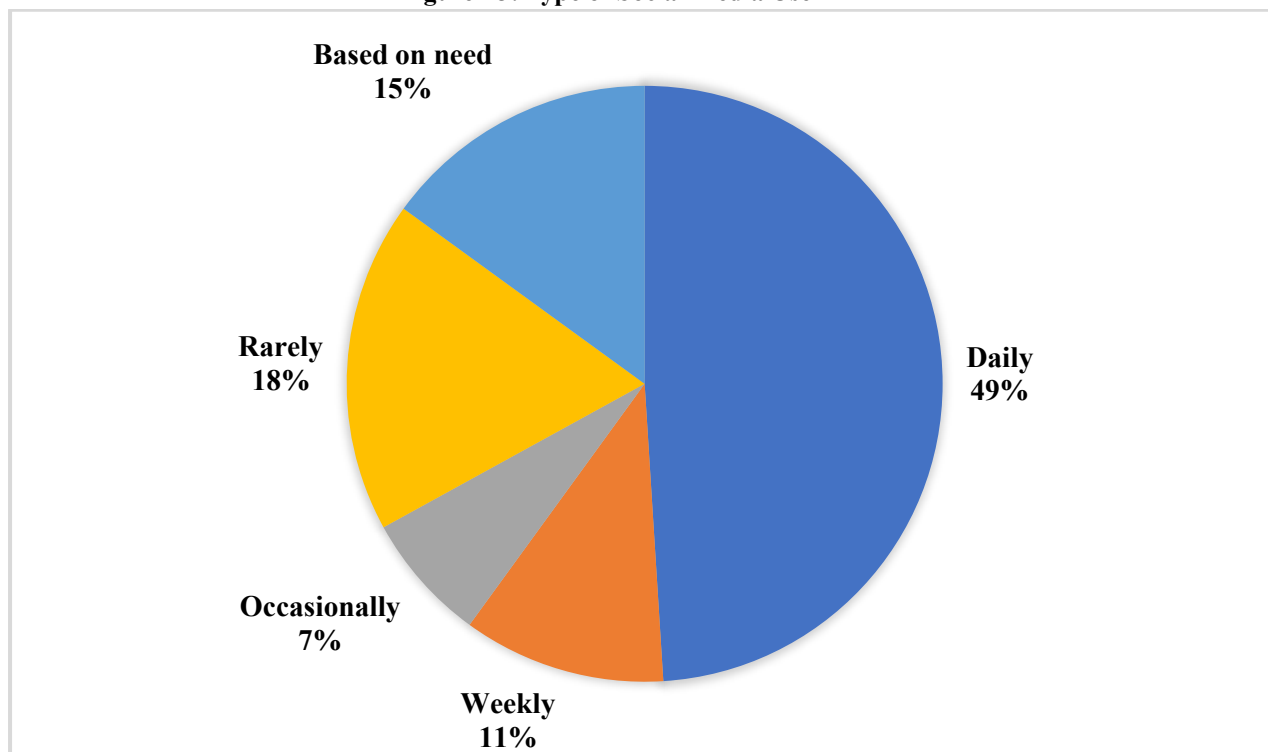
The study reveals that education (78 percent) is the primary purpose for which adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh use social media, followed by entertainment (53 percent) and seeking updates or news (21 percent). Significantly fewer respondents use social media to connect with friends (23 percent), post reels (9 percent), or follow celebrities (4 percent). These findings challenge dominant narratives that often portray adolescent social media use as primarily recreational or superficial. Instead, they highlight how rural girls strategically engage with digital platforms to support their academic learning and access educational content—an encouraging trend in bridging the rural-urban educational divide through technology (Livingstone et al., 2018). The comparatively

lower usage for peer engagement or content creation could also reflect cultural norms, digital literacy levels, or concerns over privacy and social scrutiny in rural contexts (Banaji & Bhat, 2018). These insights underscore the potential of social media as a tool for educational empowerment, while also pointing to the need for supportive environments that encourage safe and productive online participation.

#### 4.7. Type of Social Media User

The analysis indicates that nearly half (49 percent) of adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh use social media daily, while 11 percent use it weekly, and 15 percent access it based on specific needs. A smaller proportion engage with social media rarely (18 percent) or occasionally (7 percent). The high rate of daily users suggests a strong integration of social media into the everyday lives of these adolescents, likely facilitated by increasing smartphone accessibility and internet penetration even in rural areas (IAMAI, 2023). This consistent engagement points to both opportunities and challenges—while daily access may support learning, connectivity, and entertainment, it also raises concerns regarding screen time, exposure to harmful content, and potential impacts on mental health (UNICEF, 2019). These findings call for targeted digital literacy initiatives to ensure adolescent girls harness social media positively and safely.

Figure - 3: Type of Social Media User



#### 4.8. Frequency of Daily Social Media Use

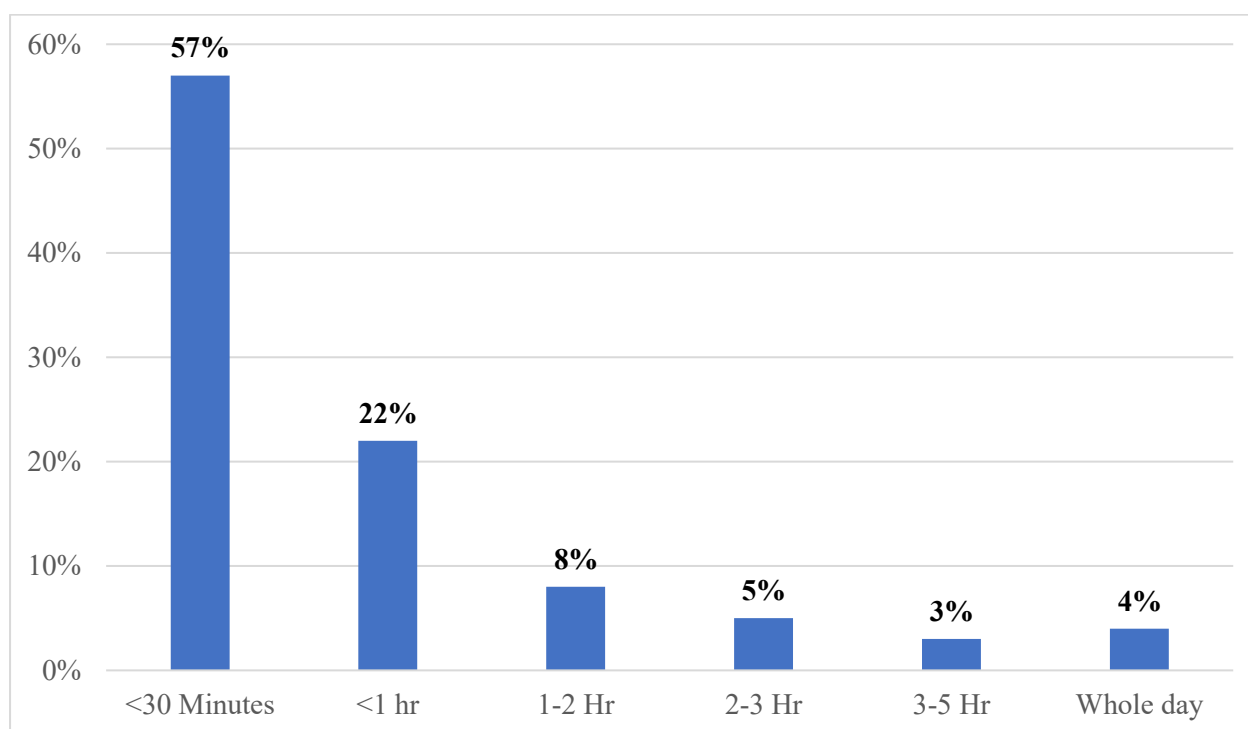
Table – 5: Frequency of Daily Social Media Use

	Frequency	Percent
1-3	259	65
4-6	61	15
7-9	38	9
10-12	15	4
13 and above	27	7
Total	400	100

The data reveals that a majority (65 percent) of adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh check social media 1–3 times per day, while 15 percent access it 4–6 times, and about 20 percent engage with it more intensively, checking 7 or more times daily. This usage pattern suggests that although a significant portion of users maintain relatively moderate engagement, a considerable minority show signs of frequent checking behavior, which may indicate habit formation or dependency. Frequent social media use among adolescents has been linked to both positive outcomes, such as increased digital connectivity and access to information, and negative outcomes, including reduced attention span, sleep disturbances, and increased risk of anxiety and depression (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Keles et al., 2020). Therefore, while moderate use may enhance social and educational experiences, interventions promoting healthy digital habits are essential to prevent potential overuse.

#### 4.9. Maximum Continuous Duration of Social Media Use per Session

Figure – 4: Maximum Continuous Duration of Social Media Use per Session



The findings indicate that the majority of adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh (57 percent) use social media for less than 30 minutes continuously in one session, while 22 percent engage for under an hour. However, a smaller but notable proportion spends longer durations, with 8 percent using it for 1–2 hours, and about 12 percent engaging for 2 hours or more, including 4 percent who report using social media for the whole day. Extended continuous usage has been associated with increased risks of negative psychosocial effects such as reduced physical activity, sleep disruption, and heightened anxiety or depressive symptoms among adolescents (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Marino et al., 2018). These patterns underscore the need for awareness programs that encourage balanced social media use among rural adolescent girls to promote healthier digital habits and mitigate potential adverse impacts.

#### 4.10. Preferred Time of Social Media Use

The study reveals that the majority of adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh predominantly use social media during the evening (57 percent), followed by before sleep (33 percent). Usage during early morning and midnight is notably low, at 13 percent and 5 percent respectively. Additionally, 19 percent access social media during the afternoon and while traveling, while very few reported using it during class hours (5 percent) or in the absence of

parents (8 percent). Evening and pre-sleep social media use is particularly concerning, as it may interfere with sleep quality and duration, which are critical for adolescent health and development (Levenson, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz, & Primack, 2017). These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions to promote healthier social media habits, especially in the hours leading to bedtime, among adolescent girls in rural contexts.

**Table – 6: Preferred Time of Social Media Use**

	Yes		No		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Early morning	52	13	348	87	400	100
Afternoon	76	19	324	81	400	100
Evening	230	57	170	43	400	100
Before sleep	130	33	270	67	400	100
Midnight	20	5	380	95	400	100
Travel	75	19	325	81	400	100
Class	19	5	381	95	400	100
Absence of parents	32	8	368	92	400	100

#### 4.11. Device Used to Access Social Media

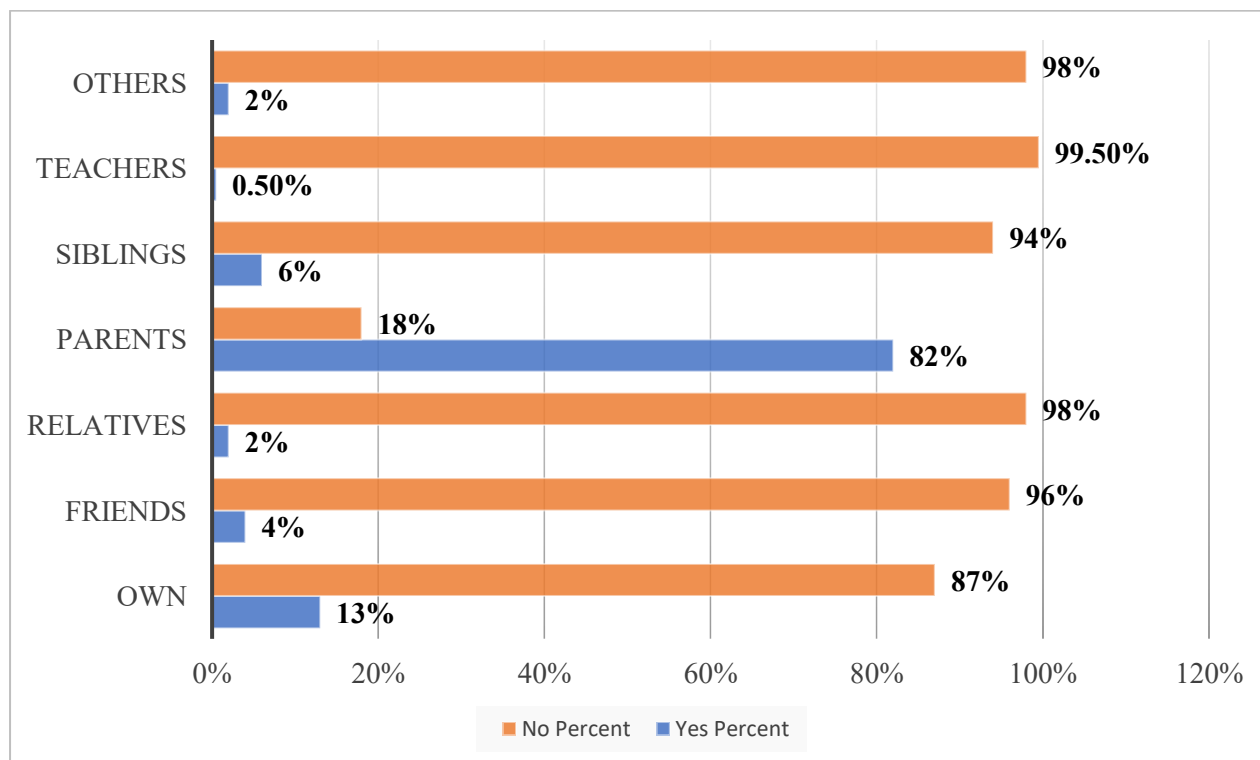
The study reveals that nearly half of the adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh (49 percent) use their own mobile phones to access social media, while a substantial proportion (42 percent) rely on their parents' mobile devices. A smaller number use siblings' mobiles (6 percent) or other devices like computers/laptops (2 percent) and friends' mobiles (0.5 percent). This reliance on shared or family-owned devices highlights potential limitations in privacy and autonomy for these girls in their social media use, which may affect how freely they engage online and manage their digital identities (Pew Research Center, 2022). These dynamics underscore the importance of considering device access and control when assessing the impact of social media on adolescents in rural contexts.

**Table – 7: Device Used to Access Social Media**

	Frequency	Percent
Own mobile	196	49
Parents mobile	169	42
Siblings' mobile	24	6
Computer/Laptop	9	2
Friend's mobile	2	.5
Total	400	100

#### 4.12. Source of Mobile Data or Recharge for Social Media Use

Figure - 5: Source of Mobile Data or Recharge for Social Media Use



The study indicates that the majority of adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh (82 percent) rely on their parents to provide mobile data or recharge for social media usage, while only a small fraction use their own resources (13 percent) or receive support from friends (4 percent), siblings (6 percent), relatives (2 percent), teachers (0.5 percent), or others (2 percent). This dependency on parents for internet access highlights the significant role family plays in enabling or restricting social media engagement among adolescent girls, which may influence their online autonomy and digital behavior (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing interventions that aim to enhance safe and equitable access to digital platforms in rural settings.

## V. Conclusion

The findings from this study reveal that social media usage among adolescent girls in rural Andhra Pradesh is characterized by a growing sense of digital autonomy, yet remains strongly influenced by peers and family dynamics. While a majority of girls create their own accounts and predominantly use platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube for education and entertainment, parental involvement in providing access and resources remains significant. Usage patterns indicate frequent engagement, often during evenings and before sleep, raising concerns around digital wellbeing and the need for balanced use. The prevalent reliance on shared devices and the widespread practice of not using real names highlight ongoing safety and privacy challenges. Overall, these insights underscore the importance of comprehensive digital literacy programs that address online safety, privacy, and mental health, while leveraging social media's potential as a tool for educational empowerment and social connection in rural adolescent populations.

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