**Social Media in Rural British**

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Shebi, a 16-year-old boy from my village, inspired by a TikTok influencer, aspired to become wealthy but was apprehended for theft by the local police last week. Similarly, another girl from a nearby settlement eloped with a boy, impressed by his social media following. The boy, the hero of his TikTok videos, offered live advice to his audience on “How to charm a girl.”
In a society where the internet and social media serve as vital tools for mass communication, it comes with a responsibility that many in rural areas are unaware of. Regrettably, it is affecting our communities negatively. Cyberbullying, the dissemination of misinformation, addiction, self-esteem issues, social isolation, polarization, cyberstalking, harassment, diminished privacy, and comparisons leading to envy are all its adverse effects.
Interestingly, nearly all males in rural areas possess smartphones. Paradoxically, it remains taboo for young girls or women to own a phone, as they believe phones are associated with impurity, only used for viewing inappropriate content, listening to vulgar Bollywood songs, making prank calls, or conversing with sweethearts. Last year, I read about a villager who strangled his wife upon finding a phone in her possession, ultimately ending her life over a mobile device.
For us and other respected families residing in rural areas, social media has become a menace. With too many watchful eyes, both physical and digital, it is indeed a significant concern. Misinformation is one of the most prevalent issues. The internet has made it easy for anyone to disseminate information. A close friend of mine had her jewelry stolen by a trusted house staff member, whom she had cared for deeply. When she confronted her maid, she was threatened with the release of a fake video depicting my friend assaulting her. Fearing the consequences, my friend reluctantly let her go. While I believe this wasn’t the right course of action and that she should have involved the police, it’s a world where society often views the privileged as spoiled, evil, and unfair in the face of the underprivileged. How unfortunate this is.
While social media and smartphones have great potential for positive uses, a lack of education and awareness can lead to misuse. As previously mentioned, anyone can express their opinions online, and it can be challenging to verify the accuracy and reliability of information found on the internet. This can lead to the spread of misinformation and fake news, with serious consequences for individuals and communities. Additionally, social media platforms can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, particularly among young people. Unfortunately, people in rural areas are often not aware of these issues. Furthermore, the internet is primarily used to access illegal and harmful content, such as pornography, which has serious consequences for entire communities.
Being on TikTok has become a new trend in rural areas. Everyone is busy creating TikTok videos, with many villagers aspiring to become TikTok stars – a dream for most. TikTok has rapidly become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, boasting over 1 billion users. While it provides a platform for creativity and self-expression, it has faced significant criticism for its detrimental impact on mental health and society. It is renowned for its addictive nature, with users endlessly scrolling through short-form videos that can keep them engaged for hours. TikTok’s algorithm is designed to show users content they are likely to engage with, often leading to the exposure of extreme or sensational content. This can create a feedback loop where users are consistently exposed to negative or harmful content. Moreover, it promotes detrimental cultural trends and behaviours, with its influence extending beyond individual users to impact society as a whole. The platform has received criticism for its role in promoting toxic masculinity, gender stereotypes, and the spread of hate speech and misinformation.
The government must launch programs to educate young adults in schools and colleges in rural areas about the responsible use of social media. As a society, we must support these initiatives. Furthermore, the government should implement censorship on inappropriate posts and videos promptly. This issue needs immediate attention, as our society is becoming increasingly mired in indecency. Influencers with large followings, along with our prominent media figures, should take responsibility for creating awareness. We must teach our generation to make the best and most constructive use of the internet and social media platforms.