

# Social Media and Privacy in Rural-Bengal: A Sociological Study of Murshidabad District

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## Abstract

Social media is based on Web 2.0. It provides a platform for creating ideas for its users. Previously, the internet had limited usage; it was used for individual communication and public broadcasting. At the end of the decade of 1990s, the first social media platform (SMP) was created. Afterwards, numerous SMPs were developed. These SMPs allowed its users to create their profiles. Gradually, on SMPs, the users are not only able to create profiles but also allowed to share different kinds of demographic and personal information. Sharing private and demographic information on social media puts youth and teens at several risks. These risks are of several types, such as cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and identity theft.

Penetration of information technology in village communities not only opens the gateways for drastic changes for village communities but also puts the village youth at several risks. The plight is that many of them are not even aware of these risks, which leads the youth and teens to several psychological and social maladjustments. Studying the internet and social media patterns in rural areas is crucial in such circumstances. Rural India is always disadvantaged regarding the use of technological devices and connectivity. All these affect the usage patterns and attract sociologists to study the privacy issues of individuals in rural India. Considering all these facts and circumstances, one pilot study has been conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. Interesting findings have been revealed in the present study.

**Keywords:** Social-media, Village community, Online safety, Privacy, Youth.

## Introduction

The term privacy gradually took shape in the needs and circumstances of ancient and modern societies. Contemporary privacy notions appeared in the article entitled *Right to Privacy by Brandeis and Warren in 1890*. He extensively wrote about the right to privacy (1), and his contribution to the privacy arena is still widely acknowledged. Now, scholars worldwide recognize the essentiality of privacy for human society. While discussing privacy, Adedeji and Okukpon (2017) (2) mentioned the idea of Edward Bloustein; "Edward Bloustein also puts forward the idea that 'privacy is an interest of human personality, and to protect an individual's privacy is to protect the individual's personality, independence, dignity and integrity'. It isn't easy to develop a single comprehensive definition for privacy, which appears to describe a variety of related affairs or conditions. Overall, it seems that privacy can be

viewed not only as a personal value intrinsically beneficial to preserving our sense of self but also as an essential value for society (2). In the information age, there is a multi-dimensional impact on privacy. The conventionally private sphere was narrow to individuals, but now it is wide and open. These few words are insufficient to speak about privacy; now, an individual's private sphere has different intrusions.

In daily conventions, the term privacy has social significance in maintaining the group's stability. Similarly, in the virtual world, privacy has social relevance and exists to maintain primary and secondary groups when required. Amber Sinha (2018) discussed the sociological significance of privacy and sharing in social relationships. He also discussed the peculiarity of privacy in the context of social media and the digital state. He wrote, "Sociological scholarship demonstrates

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(Received 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023; Accepted 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024; Published 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024)

that different types of social relationships, be it *Gesellschaft* (interest groups and acquaintances) or *Gemeinschaft* (friendship, love, and marriage), and the nature of these relationships depend on the ability to conceal certain things. Demonstrating this in the context of friendships, it has been stated that such relationships "present a very peculiar synthesis regarding the question of discretion, reciprocal revelation and concealment." Like most other social relationships, friendships depend on our ability to present ourselves to others selectively. Contrast this with Zuckerberg's stated aim of making the world more "open" where information about people flows freely and effectively without individual control. Contrast this with government projects such as Aadhaar, which intends to act as one universal identity that provides a 360-degree view of citizens (3)."

The term privacy in rural India has a peculiarity that sharply contrasts with the urban society and virtually existing community. Infringement in privacy invoked family feuds and amusement in a traditional agrarian society. During my anthropological work in the Village of Murshidabad, I constructed that members of the village society wanted to keep their landownership private from outsiders. However, they are not reluctant to claim the others' property within the Village. They also want to keep secret the elopement cases (especially about the girls) in their direct blood relations and caste members.

Along with that, local village users keep their business private before others. Sharing while gossiping is the favourite amusement of the villagers; within the Village, they share all related matters as pass-time. In the age of an information society, the rural youth is increasingly attached to social media. Their increasing and continuous engagement with social media and the virtual world has changed the meaning of privacy. However, Indian society is always discussed in terms of 'continuity and change'. Within the same context, the privacy of rural- Murshidabad shall be addressed.

In the interconnected world of the internet, the data business is at its peak. The business of data tracing and using information for prediction by internet shareholders and state and private agencies has become the usual business. Each

little activity on the internet, such as typing keywords, voice searching, and making website visits, can reveal the identity and association of the users. The plight is that many urban users are aware of the security and privacy issues on the internet. Still, non-metropolitan and rural people have little concern about their privacy while using the internet. A recent report published in The Hindu newspaper entitled *With awareness levels increasing in urban pockets, cybercriminals now target non-metropolitan areas in 2021* mentioned that cyber frauds steadily rise in non-metropolitan areas (4). In the last two decades, the use of social media has become the most popular activity. In India, the last decade has experienced unprecedented growth in social media platforms. It has become a popular means of communication, daily news and opinion-sharing platform (5). As previously mentioned, the invention of the printing machine accelerated the changes worldwide—web 2.0 fosters social, political and economic changes in the information age. The world of social media exists in digital space but affects the real world. Presently, social media facilitates various kinds of information to its users. While providing multiple information to its users, social media collect their demographic and personal information. The use of personal information on social media platforms raises privacy concerns. In general, the privacy issue on social media conjoined the identifiability and linkability of the information available in the social setting, its possible receiver and its possible uses (6). When everybody is using social media, the growing concern is awareness about the secure transfer of sensitive information such as bank-related information and health-related information; the social media platform directly or indirectly accesses such information. Before the advent of the information age, an individual was expected to play multiple roles at different physical locations. Still, in the age of social media, an individual plays multiple roles virtually without going to different physical locations. For example, the relationship between doctor and patient is a secondary kind of relationship. Before the information age, it was only maintainable through face-to-face contact; now, such interaction can be maintained through social media. There may be other roles an individual can play simultaneously on multiple social media

platforms. The important thing at this point is that traditionally, in the 'natural medium of information', the information is directly passed to its recipients. Still, in the virtual space, information is not only received by its recipients but, at the same time, by its digital medium, that is, social media platforms or digital devices. There is always a blurry link between the public and private spheres. There is always the question of whether the information posted on social media is public information or private (7). The borderless flow of information in digital space always poses questions about jurisdiction and territory. Data protection laws are strong in some countries, and in some parts of the world, are not strict. Data protection is always a concern to Indian intellectuals because Indian data resides in the U.S. servers and the U.S. government. Besides these laws, the only mandatory rule regarding data localization in India for the payment system and the Reserve Bank of India is yet to be drafted. In this direction, Justice Srikrishna's Committee Report is significant. The committee asserted that data privacy is a burning issue and must be protected as a citizen's right, and the state shall take responsibility. The committee's recommendations on user data consent, authorization, and localization are essential (8). At this point, it is necessary to extend the customary privacy laws to the digital world. In the digital age, there have been several incidences when laws have targeted the breach of privacy by social media. In a study entitled *Using Social Media-What is the Risk?* Solomon (2017) extensively mentioned the 'risk' while posting personal information on social media. He discussed that cyber-criminals might exploit sharing information on social media. However, recent trends show that people use social media to share personal information (9). While discussing LinkedIn, Solomon (2017) mentioned that it is a valuable source of business networking information and can be utilized by organizations and individuals for recruitment. However, the data stored in profiles can quickly reveal the individual's interests and network of contacts (9). Regarding population, India is the second largest country in the world; people of different faiths and ethnicities reside in India; it is also considered the largest democracy. Counting all the facts and defining fundamental rights are

essential. Moreover, India is approaching the digital world. In the last decade, India has witnessed unprecedented growth in digital connectivity. After reading all these facts, Indian society needs an indispensable I.T. policy that covers all aspects of digital India so meticulously that it protects the digital rights of digital citizens and, on the other hand, the state's interest democratically. While moving towards digital India, our judiciary is concerned about the privacy issues of its citizens; the Supreme Court of India, while deciding about the *K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India*, is worried about citizens' privacy (10). However, only the concern of the judiciary is insufficient, and there is a need for solid legislation to safeguard the privacy of individuals and protect the state from anarchy.

## Methodology

Ethnographic traditions revealed that ethnographic studies conducted by trained anthropologists qualitatively study simple societies. One of the eminent anthropologists of the twentieth century, Bronislaw Malinowski, studied the Trobriand Island using the ethnographic approach—the magnum opus work produced after the close interaction with the people. The emerging age of information is gradually germinating from everywhere; even the academic field is no longer alien to information technology. The fact is that the incorporation of information technology in the educational field makes research easy and affordable. Positivists greatly benefitted from the increasing use of statistical analysis tools. Now, anthropologists are also using information technology to uncover digital communities. In social sciences, mixed research methods are also proposed to study societies. Adopting mixed methods will help avoid ritualism in the academic field (11).

The proposed work is an adaptation of my ongoing research in rural Murshidabad. I selected rural Murshidabad because of my good rapport in the area. This rapport developed over the last ten years while working on the university campus. Choosing a familiar area for ethnological work is best since entering the field can be difficult. There's no reason to select a challenging research universe when equally potential sites are available that are easier to enter (12). Therefore, the realistic approach is to select a research site

based on the accessibility of the field. In almost a decade, I have been able to develop a friendly relationship with the locals. Previously, I was also involved in anthropological study in the Village, but it didn't mature. However, it has been beneficial for my current research work. My current research work focuses on the social media usage patterns of rural inhabitants. I will use quantitative and qualitative methods to study the social media usage patterns. The proposed work is based on the pilot study conducted with the help of an e-questionnaire. Before sending the questionnaire, I sensitized the locals about the importance of my study and privacy in the virtual world. During the pilot study, I convinced tuition teachers and individual students who previously knew me to answer all the questions that I targeted personally or have meeting with them in presence of their teachers. Otherwise, the response was very low. Therefore, it can be ascertained that building rapport is necessary to enter the field.

The above discussion indicated the use of Digital ethnography in my research work (Though I am using the data only pilot studies) and pilot studies. First, I want to explain the usefulness of the e-questionnaire (questionnaire shared on whatsapp group) compared to the questionnaire sent through mail or post. It is straightforward to share with others by group members and can promote the live discussion between the researcher and respondents. E-questionnaire is very affordable in terms of labour and cost. Another advantage for me of using an e-questionnaire was accessibility to the female respondents as it can be shared with multiple members even by friends. In the Village, I met with female students in the presence of their teachers or relatives, but meeting with the female respondents was not easy. Therefore, an online questionnaire will be very helpful in getting the responses of the female respondents. Along with the number of advantages of the e-questionnaire, there are some disadvantages too; the return of the e-questionnaire compared to the offline questionnaire is very low.

In a nutshell, it can be ascertained that digital ethnography is helpful for studying digital communities. In rural social settings, the thorough implementation of digital ethnography is

unsuccessful. It is efficient when incorporated with conventional methods of anthropology.

The village society in India is often described as an isolated whole. Following the same thought, Charles Metcalfe defined Indian villages as little republics. Traditionally, village society stands in sharp contrast with urban society. In the wake of information technology, Village India is experiencing new challenges as untouched rural inhabitants are accessing a new way of life and a new global culture. Accessibility to the internet enables them to experience new digital interactions. These new ways of interaction explore new opportunities for them; on the other side, internet users face a detrimental impact in their lives. The discussion about privacy in contemporary digital interactions is exciting and fruitful for rural Murshidabad. New findings about cyber security revealed that people in non-metropolitan areas are more vulnerable than their urban counterparts (4). The literacy rate of Murshidabad is 66.59%, as per the 2011 census (13). It is below the national literacy rate and the literacy rate of Bengal. The education standard of a community itself is the indicator of the level of awareness about social and political issues. In this way, people of rural Murshidabad are more vulnerable to the negative influences of the internet in comparison to the other regions and their urban counterparts.

The Village Khanpur (name changed) is situated in the Raghunathganj-I Block of Jangipur Constituency. According to the census handbook (2011), the total geographical area of the Village is 195.29 hectares. The Village has a total population of 8,865 people. There are about 1,641 houses in the Village. As per my recent observation, the village population is exerting pressure on farming land and increasing outside the Village. Not only is the population growing, but I am also experiencing religious changes (the expansion of the mausoleum started after the primary market's demolition, and the construction continues) and economic changes (Now the Village is centric, but it is multi-centric. In the past, the Village surrounded the mausoleum, but after its expansion, it became multi centered. It is because of the market expansion). The Village has a sizeable number of the Scheduled Caste population. They are actively engaged in the fish-catching occupation. They live

in a separate lane but have good relations with the Muslims of the Village. They claimed to be Rajbanshis (locally known as Rajbongshis) but locally known as fishermen or Jeles. On the outskirts of the Village, I found the two houses of the Scheduled Tribes. These people belong to the Santhal tribe.

The Village is situated on the bank of the 'Falguni' river. The other side is well connected with the NH-34 at a distance of three kilometres. Most adult male members remain outside the Village as migrant labourers. Most of them return to their home thrice a year. Some villages have a small portion of land, and very few have a large piece. Some Muslim families belong to the 'sheikh-caste'; those who own most land can take government jobs in nearby schools. Some other families of the sheikh caste, those who own a small portion of land, are members of the second generation engaged in the business in Kolkata. The typical Bangla culture dominates the Village's culture with the influence of the great Islamic tradition. The little traditions of Islam can be seen in the daily conventions of the villagers.

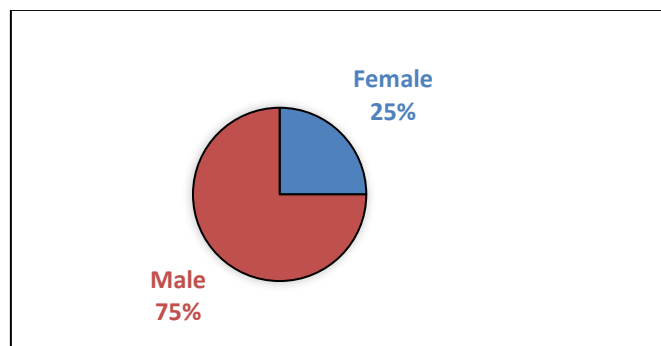
The study focused on a total of fifty-two participants aged between 13-30 years old. The targeted group included students, individuals engaged in educational activities, and those who recently discontinued their studies. The participants were selected based on certain criteria, including their social media habits, which were ascertained during a group discussion.

## Result

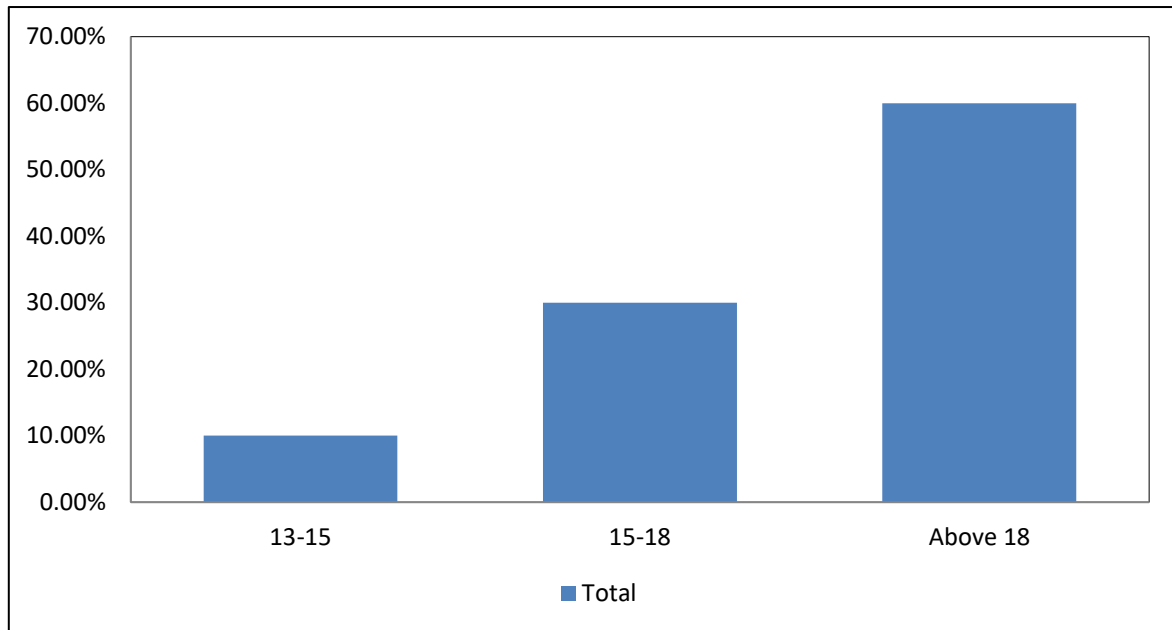
In the present study, practices of privacy norms among rural youth are focused with the help of qualitative observations. The present data representation is taken from the pilot study only. However, the qualitative observations are related to the fieldwork, which has continued till now.

These qualitative observations result from my prolonged interactions in rural society and during the purposeful field study. In the chart below (Figure 1), a small number of female respondents are present among the total respondents due to the prevailing norms of 'male-female' interactions in the Village. In the Village, females are not supposed to talk to people outside, especially when they are unmarried. Female respondents were asked to fill out a 'schedule' in tuition centres to avoid any inconvenience for future research in the presence of their teachers. Numerous field studies support differences in the treatment of male and female (14). A study conducted on gender differentials in learning outcomes in rural India reveals that adolescents girls are far behind in getting a formal education in comparison to their male counterparts (15). Gender norms exist in the 'social world' outside of the individual's psyche when individuals are born. These norms are internalized through various social mechanisms including process of socialization at different levels (16). Qualitative data revealed that, like boys, girls are also avid social media users. But girls cannot carry mobiles outside their homes, especially in lower grades. Therefore targeting girl respondents in the Village was a Herculean task during the field study.

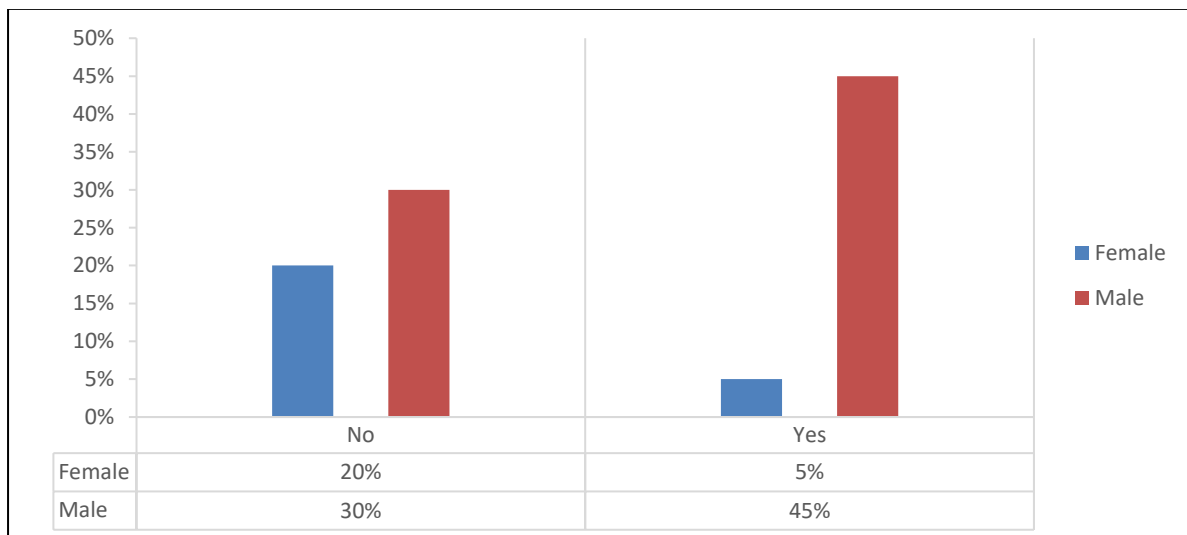
In the Figure 2 the Age composition of the total respondents is presented. In the village society, usually, lower age is a strong indication of privacy control. The respondents of the lower age group have lower ownership of the mobiles and little chance to carry them outside their homes due to many siblings in the families' younger ones having little opportunity to use the mobiles. In such situations collection of the responses was convenient when respondents are outside their home.



**Figure 1:** Gender composition of total targeted respondents



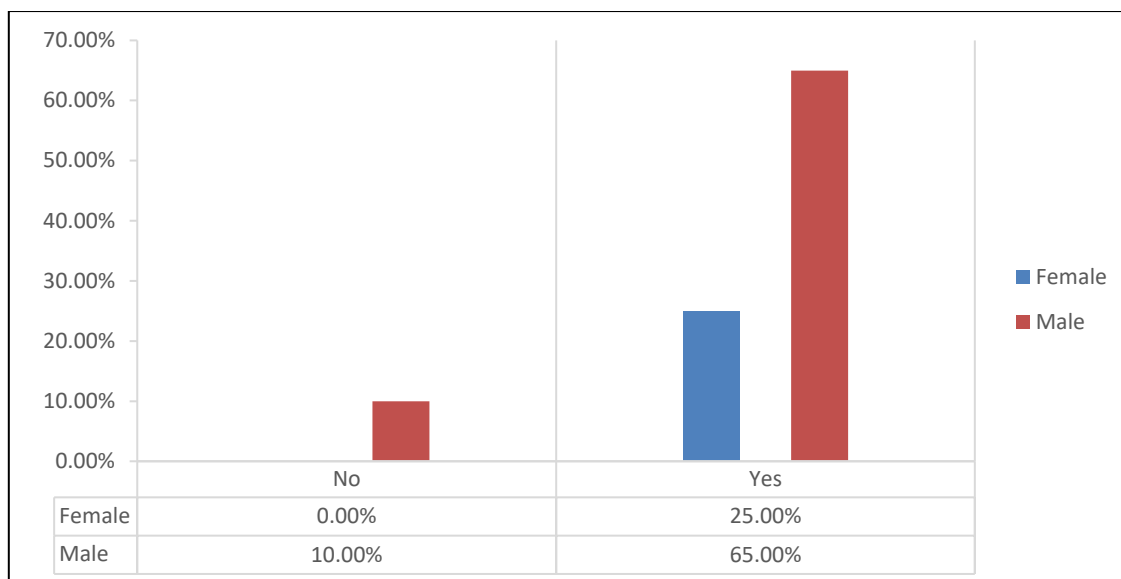
**Figure 2:** Age wise distribution of total respondents



**Figure 3:** Accepting friendship requests from strangers- Gender-wise distribution

The above chart (Figure 3) presents the Gender-wise distribution of accepting friendship requests from strangers. Getting friendship requests from strangers is related to privacy norms, so we tried to represent here in terms of gender. In real social life, girls are not supposed to interact with unknown persons, but social media have provided them with a platform to interact with strangers.

However, through the above chart, it is evident that the offline privacy norms affect the virtual privacy norms because the rate of accepting friendship requests from strangers is higher among the boys. The high rate of boys is related to the space available in the village social life. Girls are supposed to use mobiles in their homes, while boys have no such restrictions.



**Figure 4:** Having social media account- Gender differentiation

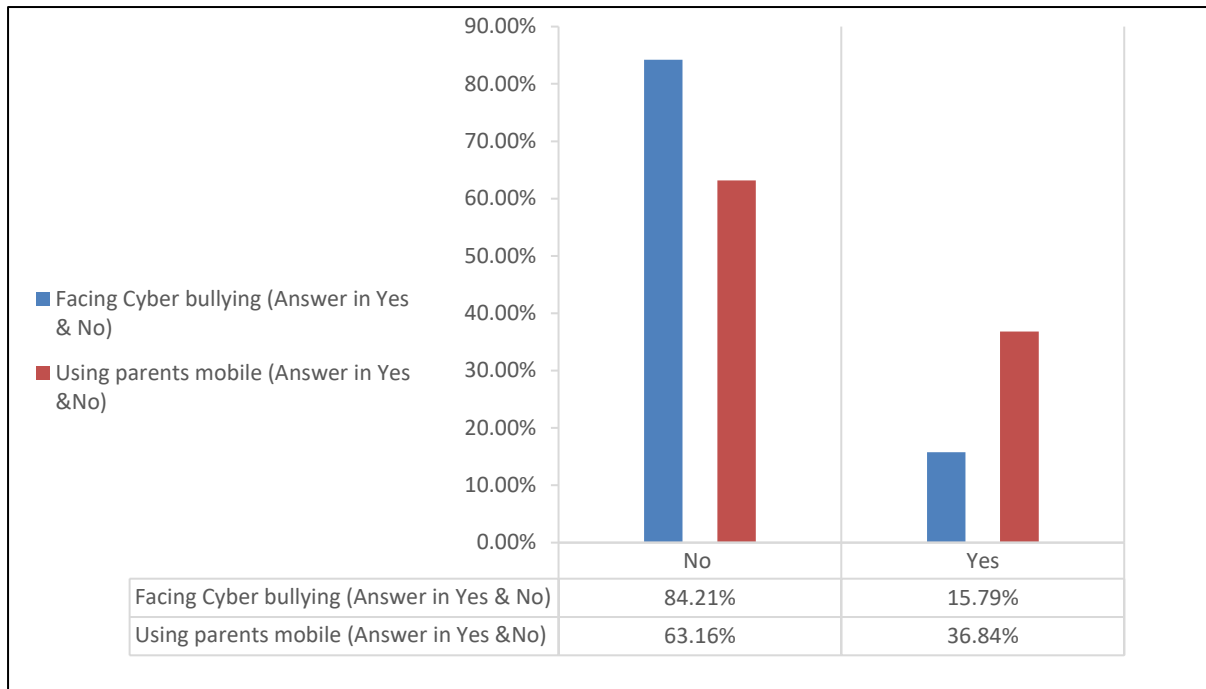
In the Figure 4 gender differentials of social media account is presented. It was revealed that all girls have social media accounts, whereas 10 per cent of male respondents do not have social media accounts. However, it does not mean that they never used social media. They use social media during their necessities with the accounts of their close relatives and friends. It shows they are not bothered about their privacy while using social media.

In the Figure 5 it is evident that those who use social media with their parents' mobile are lower than those who do not use social media with their parents' mobile. Cyberbullying is also increasing with the increasing use of social media with their parents' mobile. The parenting style and Cyberbullying have a close association; the careless and authoritarian style receives little acceptance by the children, which is associated with cyberbullying and cyber victimization (17). Field observation suggested that the influence of extended family members, limited autonomy and the authoritative nature of the family in rural settings promotes cyberbullying and cyber victimization. Cyberbullying is a privacy risk faced by social media users in the virtual world. It is different from offline bullying, which involves the imbalance of power relations, but in the virtual world, aggressive behaviour is turned in other ways and results in the use of misinformation. Both types of bullying exposed youth to negative psychological outcomes (18).

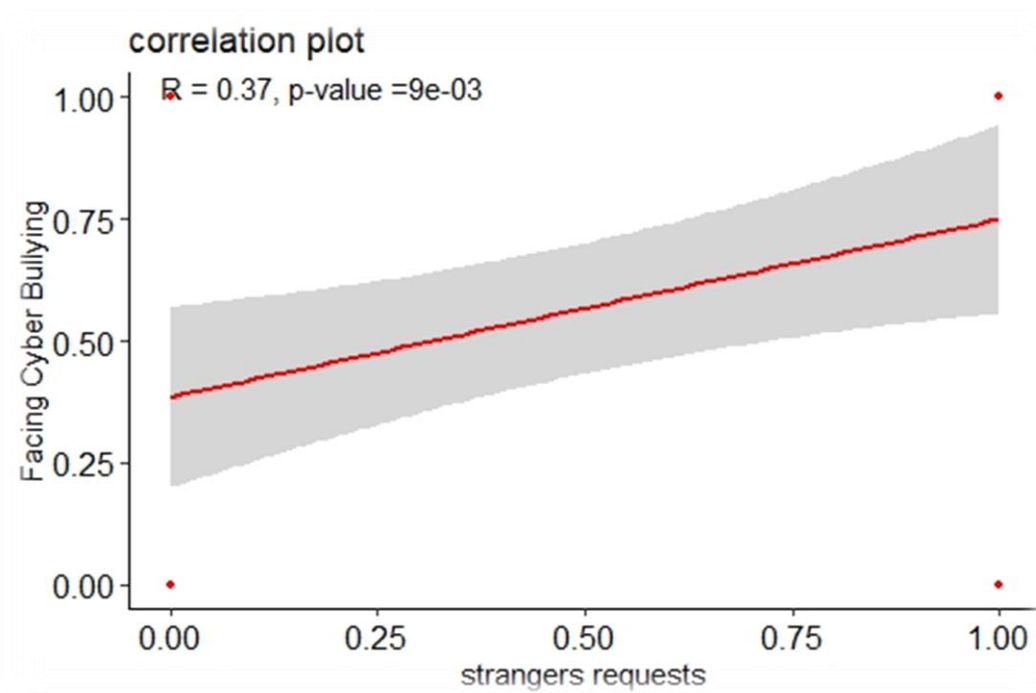
The Figure 6 uses the Pearson correlation method. The Pearson correlation coefficient (R) value=0.37 suggested a positive linear relationship between respondents' experience of cyberbullying' and 'accepting stranger's requests'. The calculated p-value=9e-03 is less than the commonly used significant level, indicating that the correlation between both variables is statistically significant.

In the Figure 7, female respondents face cyberbullying. The rate of cyberbullying is high among female respondents. It means females are prone to cyberbullying, similar to the online world. Studies finding out the security risk of S.M. for females revealed that the use of social media in India is for females akin to wandering on the open street (19). They are more exposed to cyber security risks than male respondents. When a survey inquires about the comparison of the rate of cyberbullying between both genders, it found that fifty-four per cent of males are bullied, and about fifty-one per cent of females are bullied. The study found no significant difference between both genders (20). Such variations may be due to the disadvantageous position of the female users in rural settings. Such situations refers to the limited discussion on such issues.

In the Figure 8 among the total respondents, those facing misuse of profile or hacking of account increases with age. The respondents of the lower age group did not face it. It increases but remains static for the age group 15-18 and above 18.

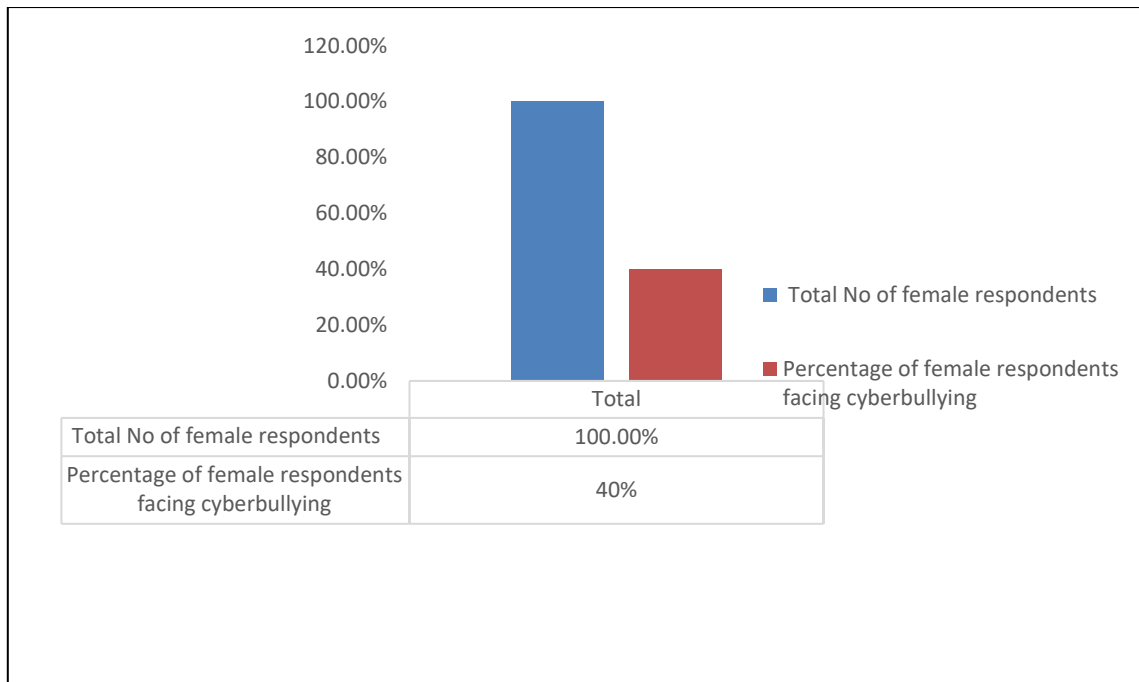


**Figure 5.** Using parents mobile and Cyber bullying

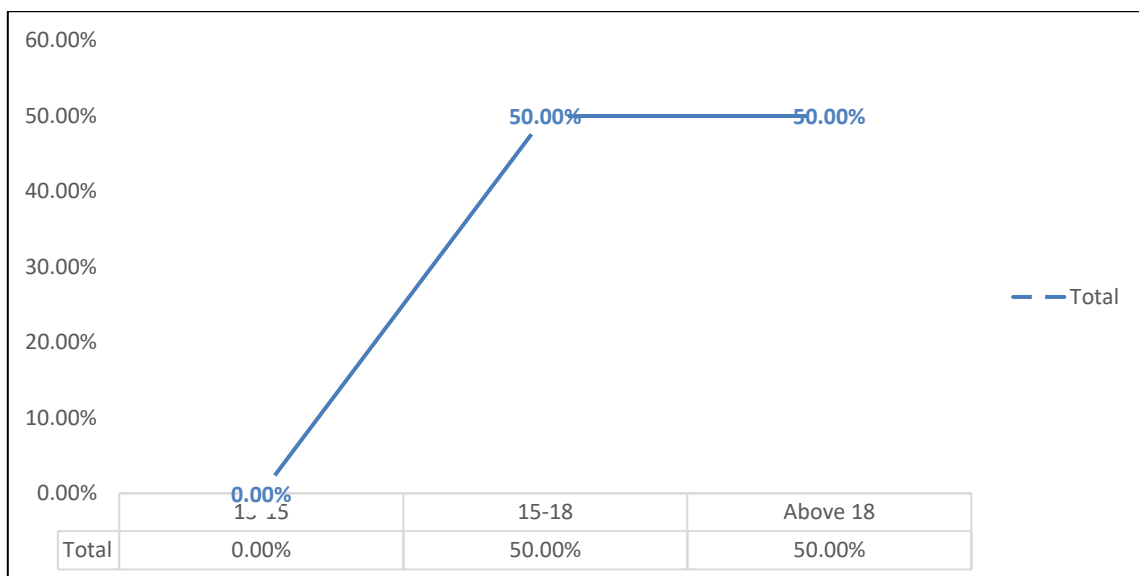


**Figure 6:** Accepting friendship requests from strangers and Cyberbullying





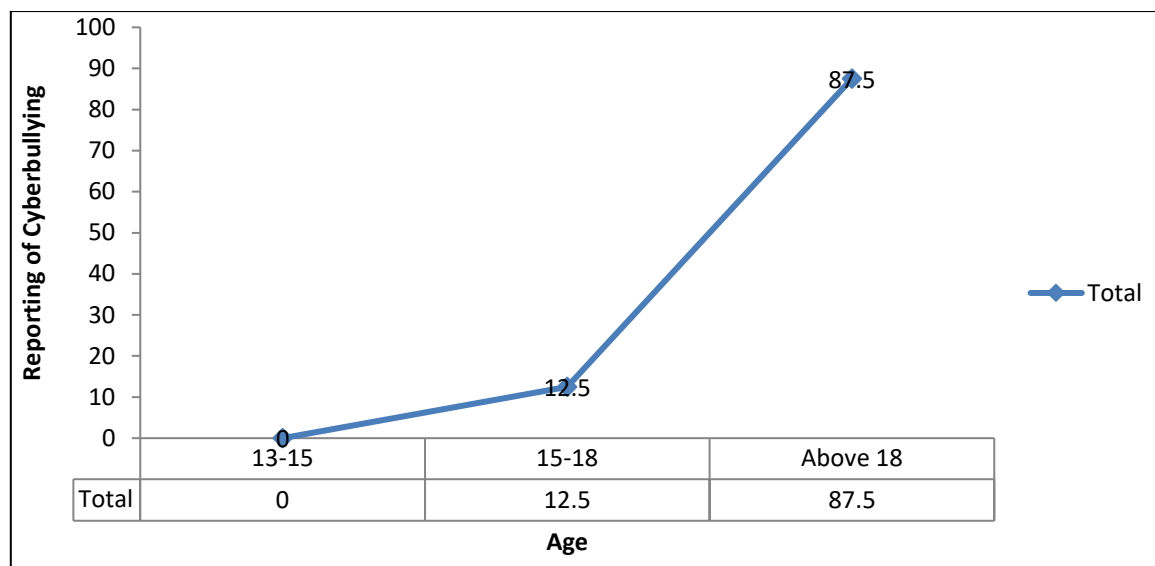
**Figure 7:** Female respondents facing cyber bullying



**Figure 8:** Facing misuse of profile or hacking of account- age-wise distribution

Young users are more exposed to social media charms and harms because brain regions involved in self-control have not fully matured (21). This is because users of lower age groups have limited autonomy on using android devices. As many of them are in loose supervision of the elder siblings and other family members. In Britain research

suggested the limited autonomy social media users under 10-14 years of age group (21). Such restrictions are imposed in compliance of the latest research suggestions that established that increasing social media use promotes higher depressive symptoms (22).



**Figure 9:** Reporting of account misuse or hacking of account age-wise distribution

In the above Figure 9, reporting of profile misuse or hacking of the account increases with age. It shows that people have more space to share their privacy issues as age increases. Age, sex, the child relationship with parents and time spent on social media (23) affect online relationships. Studies on cyber risk behaviour did not discuss the reporting of cyberbullying but the main focus is only on cyberbullying and comparison between offline bullying and cyberbullying (24, 25). However, one study discusses the relationship between age and reporting of profile misuse and hacking of accounts (26). The study initially revealed the fluctuating graph, but ultimately, it found a relationship between increasing age and reporting of cyberbullying.

### Discussions

The study consisting of a small sample gives the idea for the preparation of future research. It makes the steps concrete for collecting suitable respondents and a robust 'schedule' to collect the more comprehensive data. The study shapes the order of the questions and suitability to avoid any minor 'cultural-odious' to the respondents. For future research, more questions will be included in order to ascertain social media behaviour and gaming –addiction. The gaming-addiction test was included using a likert scale. Presently the, gaming addiction is identified as addiction behaviour in the DSM-V (27).

The present study is part of the pilot study. In the study, both quantitative and qualitative methods

were used. In order to overcome the future research anxiety and attain maximum perfection in research, the study was conducted to discover the emerging social media usage patterns in the Village of Murshidabad. Anchoring the field data with available research data revealed a complex and changing picture of rural Murshidabad, which may be generalized for future research. Key findings will be elaborated under the following points:

- **Norms of gender behaviour:** These norms remain intact in terms of interaction with outsiders in the offline world. However, the main question is pertaining to social media behaviour of female users. With the qualitative observations, it is evident that with the advent of social media, gender norms have become flexible. One observation is worthy for discussion regarding the gender norms...During the data collection, a request was made to Mr. W.R. to collect some more responses. Mr. W.R. promptly responded and started to scrolling his mobile screen. Within few seconds he was successful to send schedule to few female users of the Village and within few seconds he able to get some positive responses refgarding the sent item.
- It is easy to understand the nature of the practice of privacy norms with the study of 'norms on gender behaviour' in a particular social group. All the female respondents have a presence on social media. However, some males do not have a presence on social media.

It is wide and clear that females have more space in their inner circles compared to public space.

- Available research data and case studies suggest that female social media users in India do not have safe zones. The same thing echoed in rural Murshidabad. Both qualitative and quantitative observations support the previous research.

## Conclusion

It is concluded that, the use of social media and the internet has become ubiquitous. Social media is a major component of the virtual world that allows people to connect with each other. While this platform has brought people closer to the virtual world, their values, norms, and institutions still influence their usage patterns. Sociologists are keen to study these changes since the increased usage of social media. In this paper, the author presents social media usage patterns in rural Murshidabad. The paper reflects interesting findings about the practice of privacy norms in the digital world and how these norms are affected by prevalent norms in rural society. The paper also explains the significance of age and gender as potential indicators that affect the privacy issues of social media users.

## Abbreviations

Nil

## Acknowledgement

Nil

## Authors' contributions

The author's contributions to the research article are as follows: study framework, Data collection, conception, methodology, draft manuscript preparation, Data analysis and Results.

## Conflict of interest

The authors have no competing interests pertinent to the context of this article to declare.

## Ethics approval

No ethical clearance certificate is applicable for present study. The authors of submitted paper did not receive support from any organization.

## Funding

No funding was received

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