

Research Paper

## Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings

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### ABSTRACT

The internet is regularly used for education, work, social interaction, and other leisure activities. Adolescents rely on the internet for various purposes, and it offers a space of self-expression and identity exploration, enabling them to connect with like-minded individuals globally. The present research aimed to examine internet usage and personality traits among adolescents, with a specific focus on gender, community, and area of residence. The study was conducted in Tripura, and the sample consisted of 1200 adolescents. Data were collected using the Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998) and the NEO Five Factor Inventory (McCrae & Costa, 2003). The results revealed significant gender differences in internet usage, as well as in the personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness. It also showed that tribal and non-tribal adolescents differ significantly in internet usage, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits of personality. Additionally, significant differences were observed between urban and rural adolescents in internet usage, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness.

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, Community, Gender, Internet usage, Personality*

Adolescents with internet addiction (IA) often experience a range of psychological, social, and academic challenges. IA is characterized by excessive and compulsive use of the internet that can lead to negative impacts on mental health, including anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). Adolescents with excessive internet usage (EIU) may withdraw themselves from social interactions, which can affect their development of good relationships and social skills (Anderson et al., 2017). IA has also been linked to decreased focus, concentration, or attention, and poor academic performance (Tokunaga & Rains, 2010). Studies among adolescents across the globe showed differences in the prevalence of IA. A cross-sectional study among the Ethiopian adolescents showed that 55.6% adolescents had mild IA, while 27.9% and 1.5% had moderate and severe IA (Zenebe, et al., 2021). Similarly, students of Egypt had 36.3% and 2.3% of moderate and severe levels of IA, respectively (Eldeeb, et al., 2020). Further, a study on the Tunisian adolescents showed 12.8% of high IA among boys (Missaoui, et al., 2015), while Siomos et al., (2008) indicated 8.2% of severe IA among Greek adolescents.

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## **Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings**

Studies across various Asian countries have reported a high prevalence of severe IA among students, highlighting several associated risk factors. Bener et al. (2016) found that 19.8% of students in Qatar suffered from severe IA, which was linked to symptoms such as headaches, eye strain, hearing issues, and dizziness. Similarly, Tran et al. (2017) reported a 21% prevalence of IA among Vietnamese students, who also experienced anxiety and depression. In another study, Zhang et al. (2017) observed a 21.2% prevalence of severe IA among Vietnamese youths, remarking that it was associated with sleeping difficulties. In Iran, Gholamian et al. (2017) observed that 27.6% of high school students had mild IA, while 2.9% were classified as having severe IA. A study in China by Lam et al. (2009) identified 10.2% of adolescents with moderate IA and 0.6% with severe IA. In Hong Kong, Fu et al. (2010) reported a 6.7% prevalence of severe IA, whereas among Korean adolescents, the rate was comparatively lower at 1.6%. In South Asia, Afrin et al. (2017) found that 2.5% of youths in Bangladesh suffered from severe IA. In contrast, a study by Kamran et al. (2018) in Pakistan showed a higher prevalence, with 9.6% of students exhibiting severe IA.

Studies conducted across India also highlight varying levels of Internet Use (IU) among adolescents and college students. Jhala and Sharma (2016) reported that 24.2% of adolescents in Vadodara exhibited high levels of IA. Similarly, Kaur and Cheema (2018) found a 10% prevalence of severe IA among adolescents in Punjab. In Chandigarh, Vig and Gill (2015) observed that 14% of students from both government and private schools were severely addicted to the internet. Furthermore, a cross-sectional study by Kumar et al. (2022) revealed that 23.6% of students in Bhubaneswar experienced severe IA.

Excessive internet usage (EIU) by adolescents is often influenced by their personality traits. Research suggests that individuals with tendencies toward extraversion, low self-control, and emotional instability are more likely to engage in problematic internet use. Li et al. (2016) found that EIU can disrupt emotional regulation and increase the risk of aggression and social withdrawal among adolescents. Adolescents with high levels of IA often exhibit lower conscientiousness and agreeableness, as their intense focus on online activities can diminish their sense of responsibility and empathy toward others (Andreassen et al., 2013). Prolonged screen time and reduced real-world interaction can hinder the development of essential social and emotional skills, leading to difficulties in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Huang, 2018). In the year 2022, Miskulin et al. conducted a study among students and revealed that 25% of them had symptoms of IA, which was further associated with high neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience. Servidio (2014) found that male students had higher internet use than females, and their usage was negatively associated with agreeableness and extraversion, while openness to experience was positively linked to IA among Italian students.

Iskajyan (2014) found that adolescents who were more addicted to social media exhibited higher levels of neuroticism and openness to experience, but lower levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness compared to non-addicted peers. Supporting the influence of personality on IA, Haramain and Afiah (2022) conducted a study among Indonesian students and reported that neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness were significantly correlated with IA, while openness to experience and conscientiousness showed no significant correlation. Jojo and Sundaramoorthy (2022) depicted that IA was more prevalent among male students in India. Their study also revealed a positive

## Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings

correlation between neuroticism and IA and a negative correlation between IA and openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits of personality.

In this backdrop, the present study tried to explore internet usage and personality traits among adolescents. The research was conducted at Tripura, a North-eastern state of India, where limited literature exists on this subject. Hence, amid insufficient studies in North-East India in general and Tripura in particular, this study seeks to examine internet use and personality among school-going adolescents, with a specific focus on variables such as gender, community, and area of residence. The following hypotheses were framed to fulfill the objectives of the study:

1. There is a significant difference between boys and girls with respect to their internet usage and personality traits.
2. There is a significant difference between tribal and non-tribal adolescents with respect to their internet usage and personality traits.
3. There is a significant difference between urban and rural adolescents with respect to their internet usage and personality traits.

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 1200 adolescents belonging to the age group of 15 to 18 years. It consisted of 53% boys (n=636) and 47% girls (n=564), among whom 39% (n=464) were tribal adolescents, while 61% (n=736) were non-tribal adolescents. Among the 1200 subjects, 43% (n=520) were urban adolescents while 57% (n=680) were rural adolescents. All of them were residents of Tripura, and they were selected through a multi-stage random sampling technique.

#### *Instruments*

1. **Internet Addiction Test (IAT):** It was originated by Young (1998) to measure the severity of internet use. It is a 5-point Likert scale and contains 20 items, which assess the severity of behavior associated with irresistible use of the internet, like compulsivity and dependency. A high score represents high IA. The score between 0-19 signifies no IA, 20-39 signifies mild IA, 40-69 signifies moderate while 70-100 signifies severe IA. The Cronbach's alpha for IAT ranges between 0.80 and 0.90.
2. **The NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI):** It was developed by McCrae and Costa (2003). It is a 60-item inventory that measures personality based on a 5-point Likert scale. It is used to measure personality on five dimensions, namely Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C). The NEO-FFI helps to understand basic emotional, attitudinal, and unique patterns of thinking and interpersonal relationships. The Cronbach's Alpha values were found to be 0.89 for 'N', 0.79 for 'E', 0.76 for 'O', 0.74 for 'A' and 0.84 for 'C' (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

#### *Procedure*

The research was conducted on 1200 adolescents (15 to 18 years). Before collecting data, consent of the school students was obtained, and only those who were willing to participate were selected for the study. All the questionnaires were provided to the students with proper instructions and were monitored properly. The incomplete response sheets were discarded. The final data sheets were scored, tabulated, and analyzed statistically using IBM-SPSS version 26. Mean, SD, and t-test were computed for data analysis.

**Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings**

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: Comparison between adolescent boys and girls in internet usage and traits of personality (N=1200)**

Variables	Categories	Mean	SD	t	p
IU	Boys	36.53	13.80	2.367	<b>.018*</b>
	Girls	37.66	13.53		
N	Boys	36.27	4.88	-3.107	<b>.002**</b>
	Girls	37.15	4.97		
E	Boys	39.03	5.53	2.378	<b>.018*</b>
	Girls	38.26	5.66		
O	Boys	38.01	4.95	2.460	<b>.014*</b>
	Girls	37.31	4.98		
A	Boys	37.36	5.30	-7.006	<b>.000**</b>
	Girls	39.54	5.47		
C	Boys	39.77	6.11	-1.697	.090
	Girls	40.36	5.96		

*Significant at \*.05 & \*\*.01 level*  
*IU-Internet use, N- neuroticism, E- extraversion, O- openness, A- agreeableness, C- conscientiousness*

Table 1 showed a significant difference between boys (n=636) and girls (n=564) in internet use, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness traits of personality, whereas no significant difference was observed in the conscientiousness trait of personality. Hence, hypothesis 1 has been partially accepted.

**Table 2: Comparison between tribal and non-tribal adolescents in internet usage and traits of personality (N=1200)**

Variables	Categories	Mean	SD	t	p
IU	Tribal	41.90	13.80	6.644	<b>.000**</b>
	Non-tribal	36.60	13.25		
N	Tribal	37.40	4.80	4.020	<b>.000**</b>
	Non-tribal	36.23	4.98		
E	Tribal	38.42	5.34	-1.211	.226
	Non-tribal	38.83	5.76		
O	Tribal	37.22	5.05	-2.551	<b>.011*</b>
	Non-tribal	37.97	4.91		
A	Tribal	37.76	5.50	-3.098	<b>.002**</b>
	Non-tribal	38.77	5.45		
C	Tribal	39.39	5.87	-3.008	<b>.003**</b>
	Non-tribal	40.46	6.12		

*Significant at \*\*.01 level*  
*IU-Internet use, N- neuroticism, E- extraversion, O- openness, A- agreeableness, C- conscientiousness*

From Table 2, it can be seen that tribal (n=464) and non-tribal (n=736) adolescents differed significantly in IU, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits of

**Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings**

personality, whereas no significant difference was found in extraversion trait of personality. Hence, the 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis has been partially accepted.

**Table 3: Comparison between urban and rural adolescents in internet usage and traits of personality (N=1200)**

Variables	Categories	Mean	SD	t	p
IU	Urban	37.16	13.20	-3.316	<b>.001**</b>
	Rural	39.79	13.98		
N	Urban	37.29	5.11	3.729	<b>.000**</b>
	Rural	36.22	4.76		
E	Urban	39.21	6.01	2.944	<b>.003**</b>
	Rural	38.26	5.24		
O	Urban	38.51	5.14	5.128	<b>.000**</b>
	Rural	37.04	4.75		
A	Urban	38.43	5.84	0.258	.796
	Rural	38.35	5.21		
C	Urban	40.56	6.13	2.582	<b>.010*</b>
	Rural	39.65	5.95		

*Significant at \*.05 & \*\*.01 level*  
*IU- Internet use, N- neuroticism, E- extraversion, O- openness, A- agreeableness, C- conscientiousness*

From table 3, it is evident that urban (n=520) and rural (n=680) adolescents differed significantly in IU, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness traits of personality, whereas there was no significant difference found in the agreeableness trait of personality. Hence, the 3<sup>rd</sup> hypothesis has also been partially accepted.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study examines the difference between internet usage (IU) and traits of personality among school-going adolescents. The findings showed gender differences in IU, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness traits of personality. Various studies conducted in India also showed gender differences in IA among adolescents (Anwar, 2014; Arthanari, et al., 2017; Dhawan, et al., 2020; Kaur, 2020; Mane, et al., 2018; Raina & Bhatt, 2021; Upadhyay, et al., 2017). Gullone and Moore (2000) showed gender differences in neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness traits of personality, and it was evident that female adolescents scored higher on these traits than their male counterparts. A US-based study by Suldo et al. (2015) also showed gender differences in the agreeableness trait among the adolescents of southeastern states of the U.S. Similarly, Ozturk et al., (2015) showed gender differences in extraversion and openness to experience traits of personality among the Turkish adolescents. A study among Vietnamese adolescents also showed gender differences in neuroticism and extraversion traits of personality (Le et al., 2023). In contrast to the present findings, Iimur and Taku (2018) showed gender differences in the conscientiousness trait of personality.

The comparison between tribal and non-tribal adolescents showed significant differences in IU, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits of personality. Zhang et al., (2008) conducted a study among students of the U.S. and China and indicated that Chinese students had higher IA than that of the U.S. students. A cross-cultural study

## Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings

covering adolescents from six Asian countries showed a high prevalence of IA, indicating Philippine adolescents had severe IA, while the Chinese and Japanese adolescents had a high level of online gaming addiction (Mak et al., 2014). Another study by Xu et al., (2020) revealed cultural differences in IU, showing a higher rate of IA among adolescents of Macau than that of mainland China. With regard to personality, Kjell et al., (2013) showed no cultural differences in personality traits among Iranian and Swedish adolescents. In contrast, Bhattacharjee et al., (2016) indicated significant differences in neuroticism and openness to experience traits of personality among the tribal and non-tribal students of Tripura.

The comparison between urban and rural adolescents showed significant differences only in IU, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness traits of personality. A study by Gautam et al., (2024) showed a high rate of IA among urban adolescents of Nepal, with potential risks of depression, insomnia, and time spent on the internet. Some Indian studies also showed significant differences among urban and rural adolescents on internet usage (Bhardwaj & Rani, 2018; Dhawan et al., 2020; Jhala & Sharma, 2016; Salunkhe et al., 2021; Sowndarya & Pattar, 2018). Stavropoulos et al., (2013) revealed that urban Greek adolescents were more vulnerable to excessive IU than their rural counterparts. Also, studies among Polish adolescents living in urban and rural areas showed significant differences in IA (Kożybska et al., 2019; Pawłowska et al., 2014; Zygo et al., 2015). Zygo et al., (2017) also revealed significant differences in IA among urban and rural adolescents and found that urban adolescents with a history of alcohol consumption had severe IA. Moreover, urban adolescents were more likely to engage in online pornography, violent online gaming, and form online relationships/interactions (Zygo et al., 2017). Similar to the present findings, a study among Americans showed significant differences among urban and rural adolescents in neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness traits of personality (Atherton et al., 2024). Another study by Rossier et al., (2013) also showed significant differences among urban and rural adolescents in neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness traits of personality.

### CONCLUSION

The present study found significant gender differences in internet usage (IU), neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness traits of personality. Boys demonstrated higher levels of IU, extraversion, and openness, while girls were less prone to internet addiction (IA) and exhibited higher levels of neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Differences were also observed between tribal and non-tribal adolescents in IU and personality traits. Tribal adolescents showed more IU and neuroticism compared to their non-tribal counterparts. Conversely, non-tribal adolescents scored higher on extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits of personality. Further, urban and rural adolescents also differed in IU, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness traits of personality. Rural adolescents reported higher IU, whereas urban adolescents exhibited greater neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits of personality.

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**Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender, Community, and Urban-Rural Settings**

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**Internet Use and Personality Traits among Adolescents: A Comparative Study across Gender,  
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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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