*Review Article*

Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide: A Systematic Review of Social Media's Role in Connecting Farmers to Urban Markets

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**Abstract:** Over the past few years, we have witnessed significant growth in the adoption of digital technologies and this has completely changed every sector including agriculture. It has enabled rural farmers to access global markets, something that they found quite challenging due to the lack of information and the presence of middlemen. The most significant digital platform has been social media which has opened new communication avenues and created a platform for knowledge sharing. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp have become quite popular among farmers to connect with the global consumer base. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the role of social media as a tool connecting rural farmers with urban markets. A systematic review has been done of 21 articles following the PRISMA framework using the Google Scholar database. This systematic review based on twenty-one peer-reviewed articles selected through the PRISMA framework focuses on the role of social media in providing access to markets, facilitating knowledge sharing, and supporting innovation among farmers in the rural areas. The review found that social media helps rural farmers easily market their products to the urban market. Nonetheless, the review also identified challenges like lack of awareness, poorly-developed infrastructure and lack of proper information for rural farmers to connect with urban markets. Hence, by understanding the important role of social media in bridging the rural-urban divide, policymakers and stakeholders would develop interventions that address these challenges and increase the sustainability of the agriculture industry.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Farmers, Rural, Urban Consumers, Market

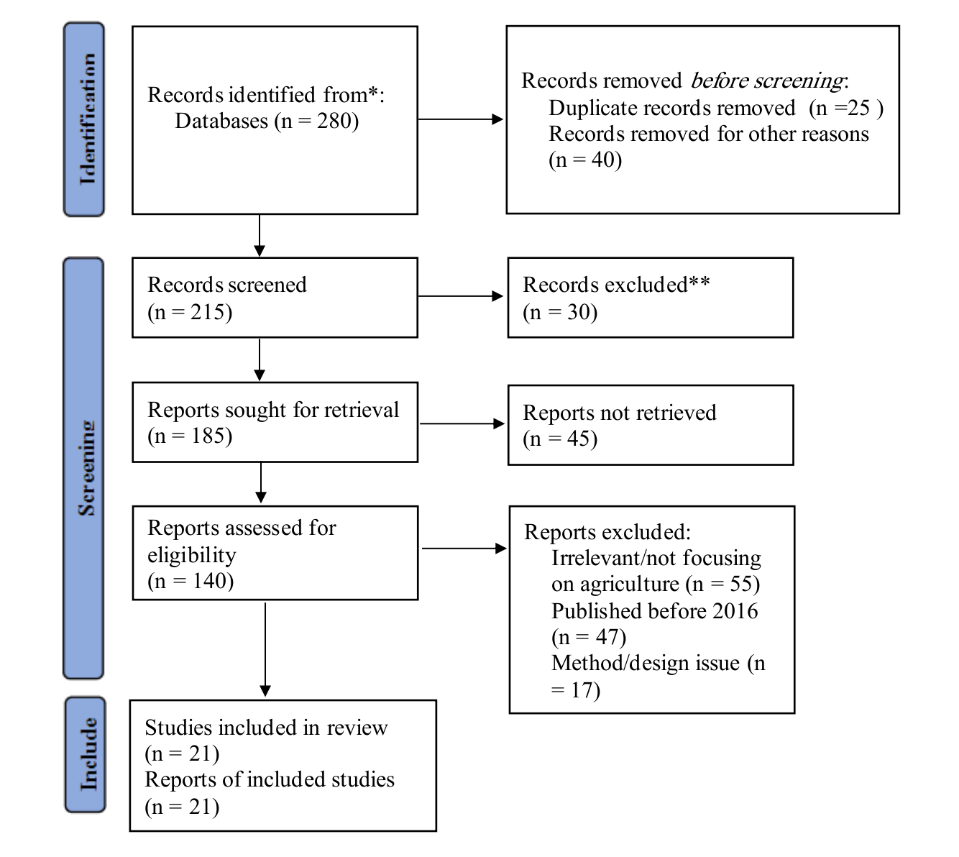
1. Introduction

The reach of social media (SM) is far and wide, connecting billions of people across the globe. Social media usage has increased significantly across the globe. It is also well-documented that SM platforms have become an important communication tool that is used for sharing information and marketing products or services. The power of SM is being leveraged across industries for better returns and agriculture is no exception. Farmers in rural regions have significantly suffered financially over the years due to their lack of information on agricultural or weather conditions and the presence of middlemen in the sales of products to urban markets (Vasumathi & Arun, 2021). However, the growth of social media has emerged as a powerful tool for farmers to improve their agricultural practices and generate better returns since with the help of SM, farmers can communicate and build relationships with consumers while also promoting their farm products. With that in mind, this study aims to understand the role of SM in connecting rural farmers with urban markets in more significant detail. It aims to conduct a systematic literature review to assess the role of SM in connecting rural farmers to urban markets, in turn aiming to address the following objectives:

* To understand the important role of SM in bridging the gap between rural farmers and urban markets
* To identify the challenges faced by rural farmers in utilizing SM to connect with the urban markets.

2. Materials and Methods

A systematic literature review of articles related to SM and the agriculture market has been done using the Google Scholar database. To that end, the research focuses on peer-reviewed publications that discuss the role of SM in connecting rural farmers with urban markets. A manual search of relevant publications is conducted along with individual review of each publication to extract the relevant study data. A database search of Google Scholar was done using a query consisting of a list of keywords specific to “Social media”, “rural farmers” and “urban market”. Words like social network sites”, and “social networking” were used for SM and a similar process was followed for the other keywords. The articles published in peer-reviewed journals up until 2016 and focusing on social media as the primary subject were used. The framework to include the articles for the study is based on PRISMA (Figure 1), and the image below explains the inclusion, selection and exclusion of 21 articles for the present study.



**Figure 1**: Prisma Flowchart

3. Results

Table 1 : Findings from the reviewed articles

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| Author name (Citation APA) | Country | Aim of the Study | Design and Methodology | Main Findings |
| Yousefian et al. (2021) | Bengaluru, India | To understand rural-urban linkages in the food system during the pandemic | Quantitative study, analyzing data from 126 valid responses | -SM was used by the urban population to purchase food and vegetables directly from farmers  -Farmers were provided with easy access to a large consumer base  - Building trust and connection with the urban consumer was a challenge for the farmers |
| Morris & James (2017) | UK | To study the use and attitudes of farmers toward SM | A mixed study adopting qualitative and quantitative methodologies, conducting the survey with 733 valid responses and semi-structured interviews with 10 farmers | -SM helps add value to the farming activities by helping connect with consumers easily and build trust  -It is a platform to gather information, find products and learn from others  -There were still certain barriers to adoption like the presence of proper technological infrastructure |
| Inegbedion et al. 2021 | South-South Nigeria | To investigate the impact of SM usage by farmers on agricultural marketing | Conclusive Design and Quantitative survey of 4280 farmers in cooperative societies. Analysis was done using a one-sample t-test and  least-squares regression | -Use of SM reduced the cost of marketing for the farmers  -The efficiency with the marketing of products was improved with SM usage  -The sales turnover also increased for the farmers due to the use of SM |
| Tadavi et al. (2024) | Maharashtra, India | To study the perspective of farmers on SM tools and the extent to which it is used to gather market information. | An interview schedule to collect data from 135 respondents was selected and techniques like arithmetic mean, frequency and correlation were used | -SM is a valuable tool for farmers to gather market information  -However, the study found that a very small number of regions of developing nations like India are using it  -There is a risk of misinformation with the use of SM that can lead to financial losses for farmers |
| Daud & Suryandari (2024) | Indonesia | The research explores the capabilities of SM tools to support urban farming activities. | Quantitative design using a survey involving 269 farmers and implementing a PLS-SEM model for analysis | -The opportunities provided by SM play a significant role in its adoption in urban farming activities  -The SM capabilities have a positive relationship with SM adoption  -Access to digital resources and online communities plays a significant role in the adoption of SM for urban farming |
| Tao et al. (2020) | Illinois, USA | The study aimed to explore the use of SM among crop growers and farmer’s market managers in Illinois | Quantitative design, an association analysis using SPSS software of data collected through a survey involving 532 specialty crops.  Growers and 325 farmers market managers were done | -SM is a good tool for communication with farmer markets, which people use to read and post information related to food safety  -Marketing and interaction with customers were the primary reasons behind the use of SM  -Proper training is needed to facilitate the effective use of SM by the farmers |
| Moreno-Ortiz et al. (2021) | Mississippi, USA | The assessment of small farmers’ use of  and preference for SM for marketing their agricultural products | Quantitative design, a survey involving 169 farmers and using SPSS for performing cross-tabulation | -SM is a preferred tool for business purposes  -SM helped in overcoming the barrier of low flow of customers that was involved with going to the markets  -Older population used SM on a limited basis and could be educated about its benefits |
| Gyawali (2022) | Bharatpur, Nepal | The article has explored the role of SM in rural development through commercial vegetable farming. | A mixed study involving 20 households in the region, engaging with thematic and descriptive analysis | -SM helps in spreading better information on agricultural practices among literate farmers  -It can reach more people quickly than any other media  -It is affordable and easy, supporting the livelihood of the population and contributing to empowerment |
| Uddin & Karim (2023) | Bangladesh | The study explores the use of SM in agricultural practices | Qualitative design, conducting structured interviews with 16 farmers and performing coding analysis on the data | -Can easily market and sell their product at a fair price using SM  -Helps in developing a better understanding of the agriculture market  -Lack of proper support from the government related to agricultural information is a challenge along with the presence of misleading information |
| Huni et al. (2020) | Marondera, Zimbabwe | The study researches the acceptance and use of SM among farmers to understand its relevance for marketing SME products | Quantitative design, using a questionnaire to collect data and performing descriptive analysis on 210 valid responses | -Positive attitudes towards the use of SM in agricultural business  -The tool was widely used for promoting and improving business  -SM is used as a tool to build connections while updating consumers about the products |
| Panda & Sinha (2023) | India |  | Exploratory study, conducting qualitative interviews with 117 respondents and using thematic coding | -SM platforms are used for better market access and product promotion, establishing direct communication with potential buyers  -Helps with knowledge sharing and adopting innovative practices for enhanced productivity  -Limited internet connectivity is a challenge for rural farmers  -Information overload and reliability of that information is a challenge along with certain privacy concerns |
| Son & Niehm (2021) | Iowa, USA | The study explored the use of SM by small businesses to expand customers and stakeholders for better sustainability | Qualitative study, using a focus group to collect data and a thematic approach to analyze the data | -SM helps in interacting and building relationships with customers  -Used to create a wide network of suppliers and sources to provide business support  -Lack of knowledge in content creation is a challenge along with limited knowledge of applying SM  -Lack of opportunities and support to learn about SM use, limited human resources and lack of time |
| Sutherland et al. (2025) | Rural Queensland, Australia | To study the use of SM to connect with customers across the country and the common barriers faced | Qualitative study, with results from six semi-structured analyzed through themes | -SM helped rural entrepreneurs reach new audiences and drive sales through positive engagement  -However, unreliable internet connectivity and lack of technical support presented a significant challenge for the rural population in operating nationally |
| Byomire et al. (2016) | Uganda | The study investigates the use of SM for service delivery in urban agriculture | Quantitative study, analyzing data collected from 109 responses using SPSS software | -SM was used to sell and buy agricultural produce, market and advertise and access information  -Challenges faced were the lack of awareness, lack of role models using social networks, complex online networks and poor policies |
| Uy et al. (2024) | Vietnam | The study explores the adoption and influencing factors of SM for agricultural development | Quantitative study, collecting data from 442 randomized samples using a structured questionnaire and analyzing it using SPSS and Strata | -SM was used for multiple activities by the farmers  -It was used for receiving farming information like weather information, agricultural knowledge and exchanging farming experiences  -It was also used for marketing farming products and contacting and selling farm products |
| Kaur & Paul (2024) | UK | The study explores the role played by SM in pushing farmers to the market shelves | Interpretative phenomenological design, using semi-structured interviews to collect data and analyze it using thematic analysis | -Local farmers and producers can increase their sales with the help of SM  -Leveraging SM also helps in building a strong brand image for the local farmers  - The economic conditions of the marginalized section are improved due to SM |
| Wang et al. (2022) | China | To understand the preference of farmers towards marketing channels and production practices in this rapidly developed digital market | The choice experiment method was used where farmers were provided with hypothetical scenarios to get their responses | -Farmers considered online marketplace as a safe option to sell products  -It provides farmers with access to a national market where consumers are interested in healthy options  -There are higher incentives for farmers to supply safer, high-quality, eco-friendly products |
| Yang et al. (2021) | Southern China | The study investigates the role of SM participation in farmers’ adoption of low-carbon agricultural practices. | Observational study, descriptive and regression analysis of data collected from a field of banana farmers, receiving 282 valid responses | -The use of SM helps with higher household income for the farmers  -SM is an important tool for helping farmers learn and spread innovative agricultural practices, even to illiterate farmers |
| Vasumathi & Arun (2021) | Global | To study the recent use of SM in the agricultural culture industry | Literature review | - Linking farmers to markets and building virtual relationships with consumers and industry stakeholders has the een primary advantage of SM  -A large number of customers are drawn to the rural farmers market with the help of marketing done on SM |
| Nwaizugbo & Abereola (2021) | South-West Nigeria | To understand the extent to which SM marketing can increase farmer’s turnover | Quantitative study using survey method and SEM analysis | -Turnover increases due to marketing on SM because of increased demand for agricultural products  -Lack of knowledge, high costs of internet and connectivity issues remain a challenge |
| Malik & Ansari (2024) | Uttarakhand, India | The study investigates the usage of SM among farmers and the constraints faced by them | Exploratory study involving 200 structured interviews with farmers | -Key benefits include improved access to the market and better decision-making  -Lack of awareness, poor digital literacy and improper infrastructure were some constraints faced |

4. Discussion

4.1 Role of social media in bridging the gap between rural farmers and urban markets

The systematic literature review (SLR) of 21 data sources provided key insights into the role that social media can play in connecting rural farmers with urban markets which highlighted the numerous benefits provided by social media (SM) to rural farmers which play a key role in helping them connect with the urban market. According to Yousefian et al. (2021), social media was greatly adopted by the urban population during the pandemic to connect with rural farmers to gain access to fruits and vegetables that were fresh and of good quality. On the other hand, another study found that social media made it easy for farmers to connect with consumers and gain their trust (Morris & James, 2017). Evidently, not only did rural farmers get easy access to urban markets with the use of social media, they also had the avenue to gather information about the market with the use of multiple online platforms like social media. As stated by Tadavi et al. (2024), social media helps farmers gather all necessary information about the market while providing them with the opportunity to share knowledge and learn from one another’s experiences. Additionally, it is a tool where experiences can be shared to guide other rural farmers to connect with the urban market. Additionally, the studies in the above table also mention the role of SM in providing easy access to markets. On a related note, Malik and Ansari (2024) highlighted that one of the key benefits of social media is the improved access to markets that it provides. In line with these findings, Inegbedion et al. (2021) also opined that social media is cost-effective and easy to use for marketing products in a market. Similarly, Uddin and Karim (2023) argued that farmers can use SM to easily sell their products at a fair price. Evidently, social media helps rural farmers connect with urban markets easily while helping them save money and resources, thereby clearly indicating how SM acts as a powerful tool that can help rural farmers connect with urban markets by offering them easy access, required knowledge and relevant information about the market and its various stakeholders.

On that note, the SLR of 21 data sources also revealed the important role of the platforms in helping rural farmers build relationships with urban consumers. The SM platforms made it easy for rural farmers to share product information and communicate easily with urban markets to gain their trust and confidence, with numerous studies suggesting the crucial role that SM can play in gaining the trust of consumers in a particular market region. According to Son and Niehm, (2021), social media is a significant platform for building relationships with consumers and gaining their trust. Similarly, Vasumathi and Arun (2021) opine that a large number of consumers are drawn to the rural markets with the help of marketing done using multiple social media platforms. It is seen that social media makes it quite easy for farmers to build the required relationship by sharing product information and resolving queries of urban consumers. Furthermore, it is also important for rural farmers to innovate with their products or services to meet the needs of the urban markets more effectively. In this context, studies have also highlighted the important role of SM in helping rural farmers adopt innovative practices. As stated by Yang et al. (2021), social media is being used by farmers to spread innovative practices across all regions. Aligning with this, Panda and Sinha (2023) acknowledged that SM helps in increasing productivity through knowledge sharing and the adoption of innovative practices. It is seen from the majority of the reviewed studies in the above table that social media creates means like better relationships and innovative practices for rural farmers to connect with urban markets.

4.2 Challenges faced by rural farmers in utilizing SM to connect with the urban markets

The systematic literature review involving the 21 sources in the above table also highlighted the various challenges faced by rural farmers in leveraging social media to connect with urban markets including the lack of awareness about the potential of SM as one of the most common limitations. Notably, rural farmers demonstrated a lack of knowledge of social media usage (Nwaizugbo & Abereola, 2021; Son & Niehm, 2021), lack of awareness regarding its use (Byomire et al. 2016; Malik & Ansari, 2024), lack of proper support and assistance (Uddin & Karim, 2023; Son & Niehm, 2021) and poorly developed or limited infrastructure (Sutherland et al. 2025; Byomire et al. 2016; Morris & James, 2017). Combinedly, these emerge as a significant challenge in the adoption of social media on a practical and effective scale. This result is further in line with the findings of Hilbert (2011) which argue that the reason for fewer women using digital technologies are unfavorable conditions like employment, education and income. Moving on, one of the common issues with poorly developed infrastructure was the lack of internet connectivity or reliable internet connections in the rural regions for farmers to leverage to connect with urban markets. The studies also identified the information available on these platforms as a significant challenge for the farmers. Uddin and Karim (2023) stated that farmers would have limited access to relevant information and most of the information would be misleading. Panda and Sinha (2023) stated that the information available would be quite significant in amount but it is difficult to assess the reliability of such information. It was also believed that using SM can lead to misleading information that can often result in financial losses to the farmers (Tadavi et al. 2024). Overall, the review also highlighted the challenges that were faced by rural farmers in connecting with urban markets through social media.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Summary of key findings

The study identified that SM plays a crucial part in connecting urban and rural farmers to sell their produce. This top trend was noted as the strengthening of the adoption of SM in promoting better connectivity between the farmers and buyers, which is usually the urban markets, and thus resulted in stronger sales and turnover for this segment of people involved in agriculture and related activity. With SM, rural farmers get access to everything they need to know and connect with the urban market in the simplest possible way. The different SM platforms have helped rural farmers to develop a better relationship with the urban consumer and to sell their products more productively. Additionally, knowledge from SM platforms allows for the adoption of innovative practices to support improved agricultural practices by rural farmers and create products that are appropriate for urban customers. The review also found challenges identified in the use of SM by rural farmers for connecting with urban markets. Notably, rural farmers were either not aware of the potential of SM or completely lacked the knowledge of its application. Additionally, the infrastructure in rural regions was poorly developed which led to connectivity issues, in turn making it difficult to connect with urban markets. Understandably, government bodies and policymakers need to acknowledge these challenges that help farmers connect with the urban market to gain better sales and higher profits.

5.2 Recommendations to Policymakers

The first recommendation to policymakers based on the identified challenges is to start an awareness campaign in rural regions to educate the farmers about the potential benefits of SM platforms. To that end, the awareness campaign must be targeted at teaching rural farmers about the basics of SM and how it can be used to connect with the urban market. Secondly, it is important to control the information that is present on social media about the urban market and agricultural practices and government bodies must take initiatives to circulate accurate and authentic information on SM through official pages or verified accounts. The final recommendation to policymakers is to invest in developing the infrastructure of the rural regions to provide the farmers with better connectivity since proper internet connectivity and technical support are crucial in the regions to help farmers use SM without any resistance or issues. In line with these findings, a report published by the United Nations also talks about the factors like infrastructure, affordability, education and institutional support that are necessary for adoption of digital technologies in agriculture (FAO, 2019). Overall, the findings have significant implications for global policies since they are coherent with international approaches to agriculture.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

This particular study has certain limitations which must be acknowledged. The first limitation is that the study has not focused on any specific region and the findings might not apply to all regions. The challenges identified in the study might not prevail in certain developed and literate parts of the world and this limits the applicability of the recommended actions to those regions. Despite these limitations, the study still achieves its objectives and provides crucial insights into the role of SM in connecting rural farmers with urban markets. Hence, future studies can focus on challenges faced by SM in specific regions by considering this research as a base. Another direction that can be undertaken is performing a comparative analysis of a developed and developing nation to understand the similarities and differences in the role of SM in both regions. Finally, there is no theoretical foundation for the study and thus another direction that the research can take is have a theoretical foundation. The diffusion of innovation theory by Rogers (2003) can offer a theoretical basis for understanding the adoption of social media among rural farmers.

**Supplementary Materials:** Not Applicable

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable

**COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:**

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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