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Rural India takes to the internet for gaming, entertainment and socialising

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Number of internet subscribers in rural regions of India grew from 34.3 crore in September 2022 to 39.8 crore in March 2024

BY JAYANT PANKAJ

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States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra lead in rural internet subscriptions. | Photo Credit: MOORTHY RV

With the increasing proliferation of smartphones, internet usage is increasing in rural India too. Number of internet subscribers in rural regions of India grew from 34.3 crore in September 2022 to 39.8 crore in March 2024, representing a

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16 per cent growth. Most of these users are using the internet for gaming, entertainment and socialising.



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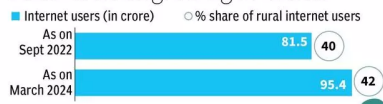
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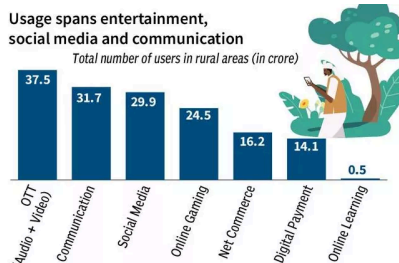
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Internet users growing in Bharat



The total internet subscriber base in the country has grown from 81.5 crore in September 2022 to 95.4 crore in March 2024. The share of rural subscribers has grown from 40 per cent to 42 per cent in this period. Internet users in urban areas grew from 50.7 crore to 55.6 crore in this period, registering 9.6 per cent growth. States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra lead in rural internet subscriptions.

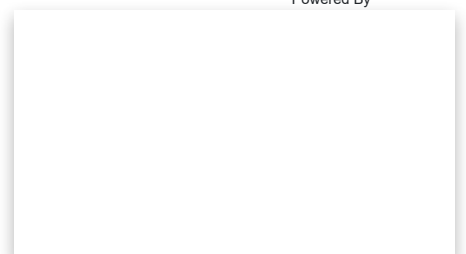


Source: Lok Sabha, IAMA 2023 report

The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMA) 2023 report reveals that approximately 43.8 crore people in India use the Internet for online gaming, with 24.5 crore coming from rural areas. Around 70.7 crore people consume OTT (video and audio) content

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through the internet, with 37.5 crore from rural areas. Similarly, 29.9 crore people in rural areas use the Internet for social media and 31.7 crore use it for communication. The number of people in rural areas using the internet for learning is however paltry, at 5 crore.

Premchand Chandrasekharan, Partner, Avalon Consulting says, "Rural areas lack readily accessible entertainment options like malls, cinemas and other avenues. OTT platforms on the mobile provide local language content which could be more appealing than mainstream language content in nearby towns. One can also imagine this mobile entertainment could be shared within a family unit in rural areas, which is distinct from urban areas."

Ram Kishen. Y, Professor at K J Somaiya Institute of Management in Mumbai, explained that rural consumption in the entertainment segment is notably high due to the dominance of YouTube. The presence of rural celebrities, such as popular sports personalities with significant social media followings, also contributes to the high consumption rates in these areas. "The accessibility, affordability, and cultural relevance of online entertainment have made it a dominant use of the internet in rural India," he added.

Himanshu Joshi, Professor of Information Management at the IMI New Delhi, says that Uttar Pradesh, as the most populous state, provides a vast user base of potential rural subscribers. The rapid urbanisation of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities like Lucknow, Kanpur, and Varanasi has led to significant improvements in digital

