

Smartphone use found to differ between urban and rural areas

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Smartphones have altered human behavior in complex ways but context can also alter smartphone use.

Laura Alessandretti and colleagues analyzed a dataset of 464,455 [smartphone users](#) from around the world, with 324,391 users categorized as urban and 52,290 categorized as rural. In most countries, urban users spent more time on their phones, using them for an average of 174.9 minutes a day, compared to 152.2 minutes for rural users. The study is [published](#) in the journal *PNAS Nexus*.

Urban users were more likely than rural users to spend time on apps categorized as maps and navigation (+150.0%), news (+38.7%), travel and local (+28.7%), music (+20.0%), business (+19.3%), and productivity (+13.7%) while rural users were more likely than urban users to spend time on apps categorized as weather (+29.9%), shopping (+18.3%), social (+8.8%), and game (+8.8%).

Urban and rural users even tended to use different social media apps. During the 2015–2019 study period, urban users were more likely to use Instagram (+14.3) and Twitter (+24.2), whereas rural users favored Facebook (+17.8%) and Snapchat (+22.5). When database participants moved from the city to the country or vice versa, their usage tended to change to accord with their new surroundings, suggesting that it is environment rather than personality driving the differences.

According to the authors, in [rural areas](#) with limited access to services like [sports fields](#), restaurants, or other social destinations, smartphones are more frequently used to entertain users whereas in urban areas with more to do, smartphones are more frequently used to facilitate access to social engagements.

More information: Anna Sapienza et al, Exposure to urban and rural contexts shapes smartphone usage behavior, *PNAS Nexus* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad357](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad357)

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