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## Social media and social change in India

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### Abstract

New Media Technologies play a critical role in our lives today in India. With over 460 million internet users, India is the second largest online market, ranked only behind China. It is predicted that by 2021, around 635.8 million people will use the Internet in India. India has one of the highest growth potentials when Internet usage is concerned. In 2015, only 26% of the Indian population had access to the Internet.

This study focuses on how social media technologies revolutionized social change in India. The social change includes behavioral change, change in communication, change in world vision. This has a major impact on how people think and behave. And this can be translated into all ways of social change. The high-end exposure to new media technologies has impacted urban and rural life in India. This study tries to understand the different layers of social change that occurs due to the impact of new media technologies.

This social change affects all communities in India. The new media ignores caste, creed, religion and fundamental differences among people. The new media has high visibility across the human population in India. This study tries to analyze how social media changes in the lifestyle, culture and civilization in India.

**Keywords:** Facebook and India, interpersonal communication, New Media Technologies, social media, social media and Indian communication process



## 1. Introduction

By the term 'New media', we most commonly refer to content available on-demand through the Internet, accessible on any digital device, usually containing interactive user feedback and creative participation. Common examples of new media include websites such as online newspapers, blogs, or wikis, video games, and social media. A defining characteristic of new media is dialogue. The new media include social networking websites, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other communication tools that work with the help of New Media technologies.

New Media transmit content through connection and conversation. It enables people around the world to share, comment on, and discuss a wide variety of topics. Unlike any of past technologies, New Media is grounded on an interactive community. Out of the total 150 million Internet users in the country, around 60 million women in India are now online and use the Internet to manage their day-to-day life, according to a new report by Google India.

With easy access to the Internet at homes, cyber cafes, offices and growing adoption of smartphones, the Internet is being used by Indians for a variety of things. It is found that with over 24 million people are accessing the Internet daily. Therefore, it is important to study how the new media technologies impact the life of Indians.

According to the World Internet Project International Report 2014, countries like Australia, Canada, Colombia, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom are reported to have more than 88% of heavy Internet penetration. Comparatively India is still lagging with 15.1% of Internet users which is abysmally low.

India has 898 million mobile phone users and 292 million of them are living in rural areas. Mobile signals reach 77 % of the geographical area. An estimated 121 million people including 24 million in rural areas use internet in India. With the increase in mobile users every fraction of a minute, it is believed that mobile phones will expand the growth of internet. India is poised to exploit the benefits of media convergence. No mobile industry can afford to ignore India's 400 million young population which is perhaps more than the population of USA. India is also busy networking its over 800 universities and 24000 colleges through optical fiber cable to improve quality of education and increase employability of its youth by providing access to Internet.

Social media changed the way our society works. The impact is seen every sphere of life including sharing of an idea, the communication of news, or the availability of a product or service. Social media is now used in almost every moment of our lives. People can live without food but not without access to social media. It has become highly addictive and influence our lives every moment.

Even the way businesses are conducted across the globe has changed by social media. It starts from a business idea to how a product is introduced in the society. Social media has also made it



easier for us to express ourselves. They are numerous ways we can express ourselves, not only to our friends but to the outside world.

Therefore, it is very important to analyze how the social media influence our lives across the globe. Beyond cultures and countries, social media has tied the human race to a single string and plays tunes.

## 2. Review of Literature

There are not many empirical studies that have examined the social and cultural impact of new media on Indian society. Further, there are very few studies on how younger generation which has grown with new media technology perceives and uses these media.

Many studies on Internet have revealed that 'Internet tends to complement rather than existing media and patterns of behavior'. Daniel Bell perhaps was one of the earliest scholars to predict about the policy dilemmas due to the complex implications of the new media technology on print and electronic media. Daniel Bell termed the social organization of the new communications technology the most central issue for the postindustrial society. DiMaggio and others cite Manuel Castells's study on how Internet in its formative period poised to reorganize the social order; 'the Internet's integration of print, oral, and audiovisual modalities into a single system promises an impact on society comparable to that of the alphabet, creating new forms of identity and inequality, submerging power in decentered flows, and establishing new forms of social organization'.

The history of media studies has shown how communication researchers evolved theories of media effects on the basis of their studies involving print, radio and tv and helped improve the understanding of social impact of media raising critical issues of media access and its impact on social institutions. The multifaceted mega medium like Internet has become the central concern of many studies focusing on how it is going to affect political institutions, economic policies, society, culture, art and entertainment media. Some studies on Internet users though found that heavier users experienced declines in socializing (Nie and Erbring 2000). Neuman and other authors quote 'longitudinal study by Kraut et al who found that Internet use increased interaction with family members and reported closeness to friends, especially for users whose perceived social support networks were strong before they began using the Internet'. Internet access is crucial for effective participation of the society nevertheless scholars have lamented how the subject has suffered with the absence of meaningful research to build theories from sociological perspective. De Maggie said, the importance of such studies cannot be undermined as scholars are under the opinion that 'sociology needs the Internet as a laboratory, policy makers need sociology to illuminate the collective choices that will shape the Internet's future. Culture and new media technology are one of the least researched topics by the researchers largely ignoring the theoretical concepts explaining the process of new media communication.



Studies confirm that Internet access is dependent on age, education, and variables. According to Riffe, the digital divide, a technology and Internet access gap, is closely associated with education, income and age (Riffe, 2003). Regarding relationship between gender and internet use, one of the studies says that gender disparity is found in the width and depth of Internet use and online experiences (Patricia et al, 2001). Significantly, the same study endorses the thesis that internet is also an opportunity for women not only to construct their identities, but also challenge certain traditional norms and modernize their lives.. Nevertheless, a study by Patricia examined the attitudes and behaviors of undergraduate students with regard to the searching Internet for sexually explicit materials reveals that comparatively men were more likely to access these materials out of curiosity than women.

The study however claims that irrespective of gender, all students access Internet and e-mail in respect of the frequency of use or the place of logging on. Education is not a variable in the use of Internet shows a study. According to Fanbin Zeng, the education of college parents, the level of internet knowledge, and the motivation of traditional media based on uses and gratification has no effects on the using level of internet (Fanbin Zeng, 2010).

A survey done by MTV, the popular music channel, across 31 cities in India among 5000 youngsters revealed that youth (34%) are influenced by social networks and are active users of features of mobile phones viz., camera (54%), send/ receive SMS (44%), Facebook mobile application (43%) and Internet websites (41%) underlining the popularity of mobile Internet among youth. Daniel said that the text messaging has become the norm of communication among college students says a study where irrespective of gender, majority of the youngsters express their desire to text messages because they believe that messaging keeps them socially active within their inner circle of influence and is vital for them to stay connected all the time (Digital Report January 2012).

Are social media credible? Social media have changed the relationships among people and their number has seen considerable increase. In the Digital Report conducted by the US government, it is identified that millions of Americans though engage in social media every day, yet they believe that the vast majority of the information they find there has almost no credibility'. The premise that innovation adoption 'in highly stratified societies will usually reinforce existing socioeconomic disparities illustrate that adoption of Internet continues to be dependent on social and economic factors.

A study conducted in China by Yang Xuerui argues that the digital divide between Internet users and non-users is increasing despite China being the market place for advanced digital media technologies (Yang Xuerui, 2008). It attributes the digital divide to social and economic factors as majority of Internet users are more educated and come from economically sound social background endorsing the Knowledge gap theory that development of mass communication can widen the gap in knowledge between different social groups instead of narrowing it. As the penetration of Internet continues to increase in every social system, researchers have focused their studies in understanding the impact of Internet on social relationships (The Digital Future Project 2011).



The research on the impact of Internet is riddled with contradictions. Some scholars predict the positive impact whereas others foresee negative influence on the society. A study by Wright, Ertel and Mathews revealed that web will simplify our life and change the very structure of our retailing and information gathering environment (Wright, Ertel and Mathews 1999). A study by Bushfound Internet to be harmful having evil influence on the society and encourage unethical practices.

Review of studies reveal that research emphasis is more on understanding the new media, its history, characteristics, functions, structure and how people use them rather than on the process of communication. Livingstone noted that there is need to study the social and cultural implications of new media to evolve theoretical framework to explain the diffusion of new media in the society. The users of new media are fragmented to the core. Understanding the audience is even more important for theories of social shaping.

### 3. Methodology

The establishment of a systematic methodology is important in gathering, analyzing, and grouping descriptive information available in social media into interpretable concepts for various decision support applications, such as crowdsourcing, profiling, web mining, social recommendation, and social reputation modeling. A

For any study, the methodology should be reproducible and generalizable to allow for the collection, analysis, and longitudinal monitoring of web information as a function of time. This phenomenon can be attributed to the profound effects of shifts in the views of citizens, specifically "netizens," regarding the components of decision making.

In this study, the researcher used content analysis method which is divided into four phases; namely, definition of goal and scope, data collection, data transformation, and results interpretation.

### 4. Results and Findings

The findings and results of this study is summarized into the following sections. The key focus area include internet penetration, social media, traditional media and new media, social change in the light of social media.

#### a. Internet penetration in India

With over 460 million internet users, India is the second largest online market, ranked only behind China. By 2021, there will be about 635.8 million internet users in India. Despite the large



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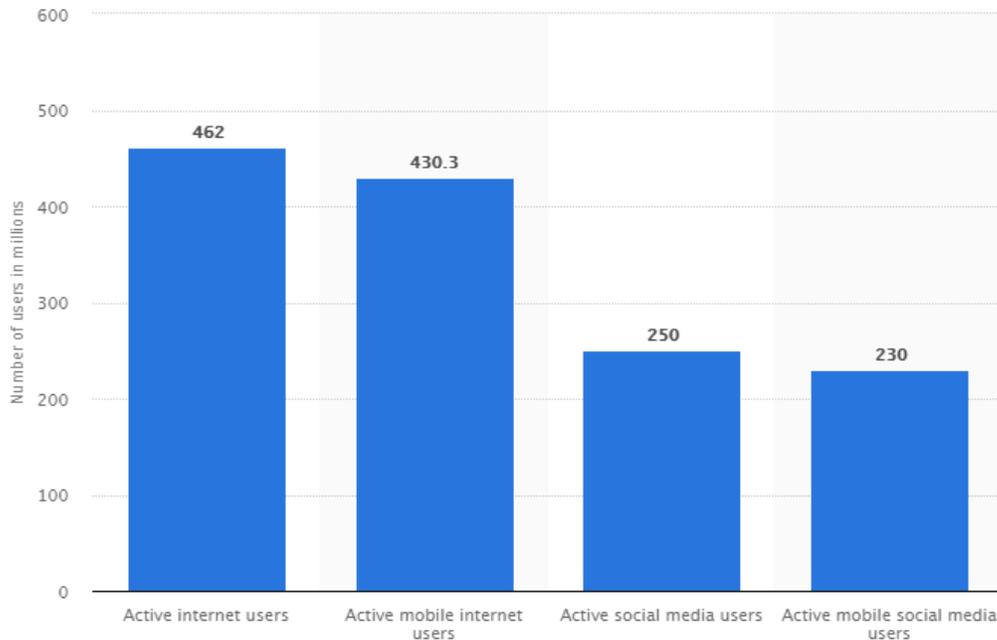
base of internet users in India, only 26 percent of the Indian population accessed the internet in 2015. This is a significant increase in comparison to the previous years, considering the internet penetration rate in India stood at about 10 percent in 2011. Furthermore, men dominated internet usage in India with 71 percent to women's 29 percent.

Indians often turn to mobile internet, as most of the digital population in India were mobile internet users in 2016. About 323 million people in India accessed the internet through their mobile phones in 2016, which corresponds to about 24.3 percent of the country's population. Both figures are forecast to increase in the coming years, with projections to amount to 524.5 million and around 37.4 percent respectively in 2021. Mobile internet usage in India varies according to people's living areas. As of 2016, India had an estimate of 262 million mobile internet users living in urban communities, and 109 million living in rural areas.

One aspect whereby India shares the characteristics of other global internet users is its passion for social media. In 2021, it is estimated that there will be around 358.2 million social network users in India, a significant increase from 2016, when this figure stood at about 216.5 million. This means that the share of the Indian population that access social networks is expected to jump from around 16.3 percent in 2016 to just over 25 percent. Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the country. There were about 195 million Facebook users in India as 2016, placing India as the country with the largest Facebook user base in the world. Other popular networks include WhatsApp, Google+, and Skype.



## Digital population in India as of January 2018 (in millions)



Data visualized by  + a b | e a u

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With an estimate of 43.8 percent digital buyer penetration in 2016, online shopping is also a popular online activity of Indian internet users. Retail e-commerce sales in India amounted to about 16 billion U.S. dollars that year and are projected to surpass 45 billion U.S. dollars in 2021. Mobile shopping has gained space in the country as well. About 49 percent of Indian consumers stated using their mobiles for purchasing goods or services. This share is above global average – which stood at 38 percent as of 2016 – and the second highest figure in the world, only behind China.



### **b. Traditional media Vs new media**

New media devices continue to increase but primarily consists of internet, mobile phones, E-mail, computer, laptop, tablets, iPad, social networks, blogs, multimedia, integrated media like radio, TV and internet and mobile phones, video phone, wireless communication devices from phones to internet and all satellite based and cable communication devices. Technically, print, broadcast/radio and television no longer exists as independent entities as technology has changed their identity. Ironically, it is the turn of all the three traditional media to feel apprehensive about the presence and impact of new media. The traditional media having worked in isolation all these years have suddenly realized the importance of bonding.

After surveying 200 newspaper publishers worldwide, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) found, "despite a somewhat gloomy outlook for wholesale convergence in media companies worldwide in the near term, convergence is already being implemented with varying degrees of enthusiasm and speed among the world's media companies". The nerve centre of new media basically is the integration of Internet, telecommunications and satellite communication. New media is being dictated by the letter 'G', the generation of mobile technology with 3G or 4G mobile phones harping on the speed of mobile network. Mobile internet is one of the milestones in the history of communication technology having ramification on telecommunication and broadcast policies. According to the latest survey by Netcraft, there are over 950 million (2014) websites in the world which has recorded a considerable increase from 255 million (2011) and a billion new pages are added every day. Comparatively web media was adopted by users much faster than any other media of print, broadcast or film in the history. Kerschbaumer in his study found that it took radio over 30 years to reach 50 million users whereas the Internet reached the same size audience in less than five years.

### **c. Smartphone and new technologies**

Most of us use their smartphone every day for different purposes including surf on the internet, view social media platforms, check emails, manage calendars, listen to music, play games, watch videos, take photos, read the news, write text messages. Every now and then we use them for their original purpose, to make phone calls. Now all these activities can be done using one single device. If you think back some 25 years ago, some of them were not even possible. Consequently, smartphones have changed the way we live quite drastically.

The way we consume information has changed from talking to each other to reading the newspaper to watching television, to gathering information on the web using a computer and now a smartphone. Today we can access any kind of information 24/7, wherever we are. That's both, convenient and overwhelming. Same is true for communication. Our smartphone offers us several ways of communication: calls, text messaging, instant messaging, email, social media, blogs, etc.



The fact that we can get any information anytime we want has quite an impact on our way of living. A recent study by Columbia University found that we are very likely to forget information which we know we can easily retrieve again. Also, when we are asked questions, we tend think about how we can find the answer on the internet rather than thinking about the actual question and answering it ourselves. Basically, we're getting lazier, because we know that we can access all kinds of information anytime.

It starts early in the morning. The first thing we do is reaching for our smartphone to turn off the alarm clock. As the day goes by we use our smartphone on the way to work, during mealtimes, at work, on the way home, in the bathroom and in bed. The smartphone has made us more sociable, or is it the other way around? We are constantly connected and expected to have a mobile phone with us at all times. Of course, that's convenient, but being available 24/7 is tiring, it's a blessing and a curse.

#### **d. Communication studies and new media**

Obviously, the researchers in India are showing keen interest in studying the way people use these new media for education, business and entertainment. Researchers are interested in understanding how Indians are using internet for more than just checking their email and how new media are enriching the lives of people besides studying access and reach of internet. Therefore, a study was undertaken using survey research method to analyze the social and cultural implications of new media in India.

#### **e. New media and social change**

Media plays a major role in social change. New media has generated debate regarding its influence on society and culture. Technological determinists suggest that structural features of new media induce social change by enabling new forms of communication and cultivating distinctive skills and sensibilities (McLuhan 1967). Ron Rice, media scientist, interpreted that new media beyond technological perspective and perceived them as aspects effecting multilayered relationships among economic, political, behavioural, cultural and institutional as well as technological phenomena (Rice, 1984). Researchers (Dutton, 1996) say that the history of communication technology is basically a history of social change, often in unpredictable ways under the influence of socio-political forces and technological innovations.

The social media in India must develop new model to encompass action, communication and transformation. It has been rightly observed that useful models must focus on the people at the grass roots enabling them to become self-reliant, speaking for themselves and directly to the power elite. In such model self-respect pride and confidence of the common people must be elevated. The responsible citizens of India must feel elevated to face social problems of distressed and agony.





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