INTERNET ACCESS AND UTILIZATION AMONG THE DALIT COMMUNITY IN SHIVAMOGGA- A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The new media transformed the society with the development of new technologies, they have affected the culture, attitudes and behavior of people to how they communicated and interacted in the society. Dalits to live socio-culturally and economically poor conditions need to be studied as to where do they stand with the shaping changes in media technology. This research provided how a *dalit* community accesses the new media and their utilization patterns.

Key words: dalits, computer, literacy and new media

Introduction

New technologies changed the way people communicated. In olden days, humans could communicate by shouting and blowing horn or beating drum or browsing a mobile at present. The changing media technologies affected the culture, policies, and ideologies of people. The advent of photo-mechanical reproduction shattered the traditional art, and brought art, business and politics closer and resulting a mass society with new culture (Benjamin, 1937).

New media encompasses the digital, computerized or networked information communication technologies (ICT). The term new media suggests that at the core of its meaning it is the 'newness' that interests and excites. New also indicated the set of more radical and fundamental shifts (Andrew and Peter, 2006).

From the threshold of third millennium, networking groups like the Facebook, Orkut, My Space, Instagram, Telegram, Blogs, Vlogs and Twitter have created what is commonly called as the 'New public Sphere'(Boyd, 2008). Young adults feel more comfortable in establishing communication and building relationship online, they are growing up in a technology driven era (Thayer and Ray, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The study addressed the question, "At what levels do new media reach *dalit* communities in Shivamogga and how do they access and utilize them?"

Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to find out the levels of new media reach and how *dalit* communities access them and utilize them with what perceived impact.

Specifically;

To assess the reach and access of new media devices and services like mobile, computers, and internet.

Significance of the study

The new media transformed the society with the development of new technologies, they have affected the culture, attitudes and behavior of people to how they communicated and interacted in the society. Dalits to live socio-culturally and economically poor conditions need to be studied as to where do they stand with the shaping changes in media technology. This research provided how a *dalit* community accesses the new media and their utilization patterns.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in Shivamogga, one of the districts in Karnataka, the agricultural belt of the state, and most of the respondents are employed in farm-related activities for the livelihood. A study if had been spread to the entire state would have given a better picture of the dalit - media reality.

Review of Literature

Lister et al. (2003) pointed out that the effects of media were determined by the technology themselves, rather than the complex social networks. The Internet has become an informal university to the mankind. There is an incredible growth of web usage during 1984-2015. The household's worldwide have become increasingly connected to the Internet at home and on the go.

Rheingold (2000) observes: "People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourses, conduct commerce, make plans, brainstorm, and gossip, and feud, fall in love, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk". The new media offer multi-services and connect like-minded persons worldwide.

The former Justice Markandey Katju (2013) rightly pointed out that: "India is presently in transition from feudal agricultural society to modern industrial society. The media often diverts the attention of the people from the real issues to non issues like.

Neuman (1991) suggests that whilst the 'new media' have technical capabilities to pull in one direction, economic and social forces pull back in the opposite direction.

Status of media in India

In India there are 144 520 registered newspapers and periodicals (RNI, 2021). The radio with 262 AIR stations and it has 384 operational private FM radio stations and 290 community radio stations as on 2020. Doordarshan, the public broadcasting service operates 21 TV channels; Indians also receive more than 900 channels from DTH/ Satellite services.

The total number of internet users is 825.30 millions in 2021, India had 1.2 billion mobile subscribers in 2021 of which about 250 million were smart phones users (TRAI, 2021). There are nearly 239.65 million Facebook users in India in 2022.

Digital divide

The digital divide refers to the gap between demographics and region that have access to media information and communication technologies (ICT) and those that don't have access. It is based on three factors such as: the economic divide, usability divide, and empowerment divide. India does not have a mass media, but 'a class media' (Eapen, 1984).

In India, the social system is predominantly caste based feature of the society. Hindus are divided into four classes based on the principles of Varna or Jathi. These groups further divided into different categories such as; scheduled caste (19%), scheduled tribes (11%) and OBCs (45%) as on July, 2020.

Rationale

Communication researchers have found that people can be empowered and changed when media reaches them; they access and utilize it. As access and utilization of media depends on the socio-economic and cultural factors, it is important to study the nature of 'media haves and media have not's in a caste ridden Indian socio-cultural context.

The Dalits in India

In India there is a hierarchy of social status that is attached to various castes which ranged from worship to untouchability. Ambedkar (1936) thoroughly analyzed the origin of the caste, its development and implications. The segregated class of the society, dalits were landless people but working in the agricultural fields, cleaning the streets, toilets and burying the dead animals belonging to Hindu upper caste people, economically very poor and working as a bonded labors or slaves. Ambedkar stresses that the abolition of caste was essential in India to establish social democracy on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Media and dalit studies

Dalit studies is a new field of research in India, which looks at the problems of marginalized groups namely dalits, tribal's, religious minorities, excluded groups, denotified tribal's, physically challenged and similar groups in economic, social and political spheres.

Unniyal (1996) analyzed the status of dalit journalists in Indian print media. Rajapurohit (2014) assessed the attitudes of Indian media towards dalits. Jeffery (2001) explored the presence of dalit issues in Indian newspapers. Varadarajan (2006) evaluated the relationship between caste system and media management in India.

Theoretical framework of the study

The following theories helped the researcher to conduct research at its various stages such as- Media Hegemony, Audience Segmentation, Media Gap theories.

Methodology

This study sought to find out the level of *Dalits and Computer Literacy a Case Study of Shivamogga Taluk* and to gather opinion of dalit respondents regarding the impact and significance of new media in/on their life.

Specifically, the study sought to assess the reach and access of Computer knowledge, computer literacy and Internet among dalit respondents. Further to know how they utilize these new media, and gathering opinion of dalit respondents regarding the impact of new media on their life.

As media reach, patterns of access and utilization are quantifiable; this study is designed mainly as a quantitative research.

Research Design

To gather data to have an in-depth understanding of the questions under this study, the following research design was formulated.

Locale of the Study

In Karnataka state, Shivamogga is a district 274 kms away from Bengaluru, the capital of the state. It consists of seven taluks and is with forty hoblis, and 1448 inhabited villages and 87 unrecognized villages with an area of 8465 sq kms. The study is conducted in the shivamogga taluk (administrative unit) in the district.

Fig. 1. Map of the Research Location showing 42 panchayats

Selection of the Respondents

In Shivamogga taluk the scheduled caste is *51333*. Among them 25821 are male and 25512 are female and only scheduled caste people were selected for this study. *Krejcie & Morgan* (1970) table of sample size selection methods was adopted here to select the respondents. As of 2022 (District Statistical Information) the SCs was *51333* keeping the confidence level at 95 per cent and confidence interval at 5.00 and a sample size of 382 is reached, this is rounded to 400.

Snow Ball Sampling method was taken and the researcher has use leaders of the villages to identify the households moving from one house to another. The researcher made sure that respondents varied by age, gender and caste sub-groups. However, due to the unpredictability of their availability at households, during survey, equal representation could not give for such stratification.

Shivamogga taluk has 42 gram panchayats (local administrative divisions), the study was conducted in 61 villages belonging to the 42 gram panchayats, as shown in the figure – 1. All the 42 panchayats were covered. Further, 15 dalit leaders were selected for in depth interview and discussion about the topic under research of total respondents are 415.

Research methods

The study was *quantitative* in nature. To study *Dalits and Computer Literacy a Case Study of Shivamogga Taluk*, a survey research was found to be most appropriate.

Survey - The researcher conducted a survey that covered all the 400 respondents with the help of research assistants also.

Questionnaire - Questionnaire is prepared in English and later translated into Kannada. It had both close ended and open ended questions. Perspectives were filled based on *Lickert* scale.

Interview - In this research the researcher conducted interviews with fifteen dalit leaders from the locale of the study.

Data gathering and analyses

The researcher gathered the data with the support of research assistants and personally visiting some of the villages of the respondents, and the answers given to the questions were entered to spread sheets and researcher used mainly

measures of central tendency to seek answers to the research objectives. The results were tabulated, and presented through tables, pie-charts, and bar charts.

Operational definitions - The following variables are operationally defined as to how they are dealt with in the research.

Media reach - In this research *media reach* refers to whether the signal or media services are reaching the geographical area under study.

Media access - Access is operationally defined as the social, economical capacity of individual to own various media gadgets and avail related services.

Media utilization pattern - utilization pattern operationally refers to in what frequency and for what purpose, where, when and how the new media is used.

Dalits – Ambedkar defines dalits as those ill treated, humiliated, even discarded, denied common civil rights, people mainly belonging to lowest ring of Hindu caste system.

Income of the family – United Nation defines poverty based on the level on annual income. The threshold of poverty line is approximately Rs. 1060/- per month in rural areas and Rs. 1080/- in urban areas in India.

Results and Discussions

This study Dalits and Computer Literacy - a Case Study of Shivamogga Taluk focuses on the finding out access of computers, its ownership and internet utilization by dalits. The primary data was collected through the questionnaires administered with 400 dalit respondents of Shivamogga taluk, and interview conducted with 15 DSS representatives. The gathered data has been analyzed, discussed and presented below.

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PART A

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RQ: Access and utilization of internet by the Respondents

This objective sought to find out the reach and access of new media gadgets among the respondents. As new media technologies are incorporated the mobile phone and internet media were too important and analyzed.

Age and gender of the respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic features of the respondents. The respondents belonged to various age groups. The age group of the respondents 13-24 years was 30.5 percent. Among them males were 18.75 percent and 11.75 were females. In the age group of respondents above 55 years, 4.75 percent were males and 2.00 percent females. Among the respondents 240 (60%) were male and 160 (40%) were female. The majority belonged to 13-24 age groups.

Table 1. Age and gender of the respondents

Age group	No. of Respondents					
	Male		Female		Total	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
13-24	75	18.75	47	11.75	122	30.5
25-34	74	18.50	45	11.25	119	29.75
35-44	41	10.25	34	8.50	75	18.75
45-54	31	7.75	26	6.50	57	14.00
55 and above	19	4.75	8	2.00	28	7.00
Total	**240**	**60**	**160**	**40**	**400**	**100.00**

Table 2. Occupation of the respondents

Occupation	No. of respondents	Percentage
Coolie labourers	111	27.75
Employee	99	24.75
Students	61	15.25
House wives	54	13.5
Drivers / Painters etc.	37	9.25
Business	19	4.75
Farmers	16	4.00
Unanswered	3	0.75
Total	**400**	**100.00**

Table 2 shows the occupation of the respondents. Among 400 respondents, the majority were coolie labourers 111 (27.75%), followed by 99 employees (both government and private 24.75%) Students comprised 15.25 percent and home making women were 13.5%.

PART B

Internet and the Dalits

Table 3. Internet Access of the respondents

Internet Access Mode	Nos.	Percentage
Access internet in smart phone	183	45.75
Connected via Wi-Fi /Hotspot at home	63	15.75
Access at alternate places	30	7.5
Connected via telephone/broadband at home	5	1.25
No internet access	74	18.5
Unanswered	45	11.25
Total	**400**	**100.00**

Table 3 shows the internet connection at home. Out of 400 respondents, 63 (15.75%) of the respondents were accessing internet though Wifi / Hotspot at home; 5 (1.25%) via telephone / broadband; majority 183 (45.75%) through smart phone. However 74 (18.50%) respondents did not have any access to internet, and 75 (18.75%) respondents abstained from answering. Thus there were 281 (70.25%) respondents accessing internet.
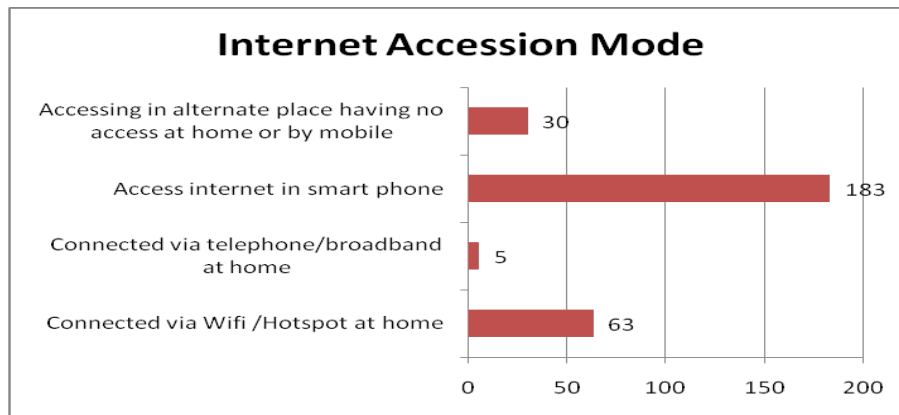

Fig. 2. Mode of internet accession

Table 4. Internet providing company

Internet providing company	Nos.	
AIRTEL	179	
BSNL	26	
JIO	87	
Total Connections	292	

The major service provider was Airtel (179) followed by Jio (87) and BSNL (26). Few respondents had multiple service providers.

Table 5. Alternate Internet accessing point

Alternate Intent accessing point	Nos.	
Cyber Café	185	
Friends / Relatives House	67	
College / Working Place / Office	29	
Total	**281**	

The above table shows that if there is no internet with the respondents the alternate ways of getting internet access is sought. Those with internet access at home also were accessing at alternate places. 67 (16.75%) of the 281 respondents access internet in friends and relatives house, 185 (46.25%) of them utilize cyber café, 29 (7.25%) use it in their working / studying place like college or office. No response was given by 119 respondents.

Conclusion

Reach and access of internet

The internet was not that common among the respondents. About 63 (15.75%) of the respondents were accessing internet though Wi-Fi / Hotspot at home, 5 via telephone / broadband (1.25%) and 183 through smart phone (45.75%). However 74 respondents did not have any access to internet and 75 respondents abstained from answering. Thus there were 70.25 percent of respondents benefitted from internet at some point of time. Those with internet access at home also were accessing it in friends and relatives house, or at cyber café. Thus though above 70 percent had access to internet their usage level was different.

As per ITUs World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database shows 43 percent of the population in India uses the internet. About 21 percent of women in India and 42 percent of men are mobile internet users (GSMA, 2020). According to CBGA (2020) only eight percent Indian households had computer enabled with internet. The study shows that dalits in Shivamogga, all sourcing devices put together are amazingly high compared to national average.

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