



New media and empowerment of dalits

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Abstract

The world has witnessed commendable new media revolution, knowledge expansion and interactive communication. The new media have created the virtual communities and transcended the geographical boundaries. The new media technologies are basically digital, networkable, compressible and interactive. The new media particularly the Internet, provide the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere, in which citizens can participate in well informed and non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social structures. India also achieved commendable progress in the field of communication science and technology. The policy makers have realized that active participation of underprivileged, marginalized, underserved and under-represented segments of society, including women and weaker sections is very crucial from the point of view of inclusive development. The crucial role of new media in the empowerment of Dalits becomes clear since the society moves towards a knowledge – based and development – oriented society. The role of media in national development is widely acknowledged as highly crucial by the media scholars.

Keywords: new media, inclusive development, empowerment of dalits

Introduction: Preamble

The world has witnessed commendable new media revolution, knowledge expansion and interactive communication. The new media have also created the 'virtual communities' and transcended the geographical boundaries thus eliminating social restrictions. Truly, information technology is the common denominator that links people regardless of region, religion, caste, color, creed, race or political alignments. The media convergence became a reality in the far end of 20th century. India is heading in the right direction with the development and application of new media in all walks of life. The basis of the new media revolution in India is the technological revolution in telecommunications, computers and electronic media. The role of new media in the empowerment of Dalits is primarily examined in this article based on qualitative research methodology.

Salient Features of New Media

The new media technologies are basically digital, networkable, compressible and interactive. Broadly speaking, the Internet, websites, computer multimedia, video games, augmented reality, CD-ROMs and DVDs constitute the gamut of 'new media'. Practically, the term 'new media' refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, and creative participation. The new media are also known for real-time generation of new and unregulated content. The new media entered the world during the fag end of 20th century. The world also witnessed a different kind of parallel relationship between social changes and computer design. Shapiro (1990:10) ^[10] argues that the "emergence of new, digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is

in control of information, experience and resources". Neuman (1991) ^[7] suggests that whilst the 'new media' have technical capabilities to pull in one direction, economic and social forces pull back in the opposite direction. The people have witnessed the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video and electronic text communications that have blurred the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication.

Neuman (1991) ^[7] identifies the characteristics of new media as follows:

- Alter the meaning of geographic distance.
- Allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication.
- Provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication.
- Provide opportunities for interactive communication.
- Allow forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect.

Manovich identified eight propositions of new media such as: association of cyber culture with new media. Computer technology oriented distribution platform of new media, new media as digital data controlled by software, new media mix between cultural conventions and the conventions of software, new media as the aesthetics carrying modern communication technologies, faster execution of information services by the new media, new media as met media and new media as parallel articulation of similar Ideas. These features have led to the creation of remarkably similar images and spatial structures.

Biocca (2000) ^[1] stated that there is no single new media device but there is a family of intelligent information

technologies. The characteristics of computer include: a) computer medium is evolving more rapidly than traditional media, b) computer involves a family of intelligent information technologies, c) computer involves different configurations of input and output devices, d) computer involves new interaction algorithms and techniques, e) computer combines multisensory content, various types of interface and various transmission systems for delivering information services, f) computer interfaces, content and transmission systems continuously evolve, and g) cyberspace expands rapidly. These features make computer a powerful media of communication.

Kellner and Bohman have stated that new media particularly the Internet, provides the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere, in which citizens can participate in well informed and non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social structures. Lister et al. (2003) ^[5] pointed out that the effects of media were determined by the technology themselves, rather than the complex social networks. It appears that the Internet generation will be born into a world of information abundance. 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. Scholars have also pointed out that with technological advances and an increasing number of startups focused on mobile apps, Internet and mobile device usage continues to skyrocket.

The rise of new media has allowed the people to express themselves through blogs, websites, videos, pictures and other user-generated media. New media have brought about the globalization of all kinds of transactions according to Flew (2002) ^[2]. Globalization is termed as more than expansion of activities beyond the boundaries of particular nation states. The electronic communication has also killed the distance and enhanced the social relationships across the globe. Volkmer (1999) ^[11] has noted that the new media have brought about a new trend of the globalized public sphere as a geographical expansion from a nation to worldwide and changed the relationship between the public, the media and state.

The new media have also created virtual communities which transcend geographical boundaries thus eliminating social restrictions through online communication. Rheingold (2000) ^[9] observes: "People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourses, conduct commerce, make plans, brainstorm, 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.

Manovich (2001) ^[6] contends that mass media corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, which values conformity over individuality while the new media follows the logic of the postindustrial or globalized society whereby every citizen can construct his/her own custom lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices. Interactivity has become a new way of life because of new media intervention. The digitalization of media has brought about media convergence that facilitates user-to-user interactivity and interactivity between user and information. The convergence of new methods of communication with new technologies

shifts the model of mass communication to 'many to many' communication. Interactive new media has become a true benefit to the mankind because people can express their thoughts and deeds in more than one way with the help of technologies.

The new media have created virtual realities which have expanded the horizons of understanding and interaction. The new media industry has gained the advantages of two-way dialogue with consumers primarily through the Internet. Interactive websites and kiosks have become popular in modern times. Scholars have defined new media industry as cool, creative and egalitarian. The industry is also dominated by the young generation of people. The studies have revealed that the amount of time young people spend with new media has risen dramatically. The 8-18 year-olds devote about 8 hours of time on infotainment and edutainment services across the globe. The new media are also used for active social and political mobilization all over the world. There is a well established connection between the amount and degree of voter engagement and turnout according to Owen (2011) ^[8].

The young generation of students in schools, colleges and universities are attracted by the online sources which facilitate active involvement, communication and mobilization. In particular, the social media have provided a deliberative space to discuss and encourage political participation, both directly and indirectly, note Halpern and Gibbs (2013) ^[4]. The new media networked information will continue to grow at a rapid pace in future. The number of access points into the Internet is expanding in number, variety and mobility. It is estimated that members of the Internet generation normally spend as much as 20 years of their lives in front of Internet.

New Media in India

India also achieved commendable progress in the field of communication science and technology. The new media have grown considerably in India. The new media have been rightly considered as the instruments of development by the scholars all over the world. The Government of India has formulated the new media policy in order to facilitate expansion, decentralization and democratization of new media in the Indian Republic. The policy makers have realized that active participation of underprivileged, marginalized, underserved and under-represented segments of society, including women and weaker sections is very crucial from the point of view of inclusive development. India is heading in the right direction with the development of new media in modern society. The telecommunication, satellite communication and computer communication technological applications constitute the gamut of 'new media' in modern society. Modern government and non-government organizations have utilized the new media for developmental endeavors in all spheres of human life.

The liberalization of Indian economy in 1991 under the dynamic leadership of P.V.Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh brought about remarkable economic growth of over 6% annually during 1993-2002. The economic reforms were driven in part by significant application of new media in India. The National Democratic Alliance Government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee accorded high priority for the development of new media in India. The Government formed the Indian

National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development in 1996. India achieved series of developments in the fields of telecommunication, satellite communication and computer communication by the end of the 20th century. The BSNL, Bharti Airtel, Reliance Communications, Vodafone and other organizations became the prominent institutions which played a crucial role in the telecom revolution in India.

India has become a prominent nation in the world for the development and application of new communication technologies which have become effective instruments of education and development. Eminent communication scholars and scientists have prepared grounds for the conduction of new media experiments in the country. India is in the forefront in the field of new media management in the world and conducted several experiments in the field of application of new media for various developmental endeavors during the last quarter of 20th century. In the present times, the social media have also become prominent tools of multi-faceted development of the country on the basis of interactive and democratized communication in urban and rural areas. The communication and information specialists have adopted the best strategies for the effective management of new media for various developmental activities in the age of globalization.

Guru and Mariswamy (2014) ^[3] comment: "The new media have grown commendably in India over a period of time. The Government of India have formulated the new media policy to facilitate expansion, decentralization, democratization and localization of new media services which have brought about participatory governance and development in Indian sub-continent. The central government and provincial governments have worked together to herald a new era of active people's participation in the process of development at various levels. India is in the forefront in the field of new media management in the world and conducted several experiments in the field of application of new media for various developmental endeavors in the country".

The central government also prepared solid grounds for the development of e-governance in the country through several initiatives towards ICT at various stages of development/implementation of central government which includes - India Portal, National Institute of e-governance, central repository of data, dissemination of information relating to best practices/innovations in e-governance, awards for best websites and innovative use of IT in the delivery of public services. The citizen service centers were set up for one stop and non-stop delivery of services to the public. The India Portal is a user-friendly portal of all government web sites for providing information and delivery of services on the policies and programmes of the government. Several state governments also launched innovative steps to promote e-governance across the country. Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka emerged as model states in the application of new media for development purposes.

The new media have become an all pervasive sources of communication which ensure connectivity among the people in all walks of life. The new communication and information technologies have brought about the death of distance and facilitated meaningful participatory communication and development all over the world. The emergence of Internet

replaced the one to many model of traditional mass communication with the possibility of many to many web of communication. The new media industry has grown commendably and changed the cultural landscape, specifically introducing a range of ideas, deeds, food habits, life styles and socio-economic transactions. Internet, computer and mobile phones have become sensual gadgets across urban and rural environment.

New media revolution has resulted in the globalization which shortens the distance between people all over the world by the electronic communication. Internet is also one of the major tools of interactive communication in modern society. Interactivity has become a key term for number of new media use options evolving from the rapid dissemination of Internet access point, the digitalization of the media and media convergence. Many researchers have studied the impact of new media on people in modern society which has brought about connectedness.

The new media have brought about remarkable changes in the attitudes, behaviors and transactions all over the world. In fact, globalization process and technological advancements have changed the experience and sensibility of people about time and space. The individual and collective perceptions have been increasingly structured within national and global frames and shaped by new media technologies. Lipscomb noted that new media technologies allowed people not only to witness and share events in a more direct and personal manner, but also to produce memory themselves, through various devices. The social media have moved into the real world. The new media have created a new information age which has spread its influence to all walks of life including education.

New media have explored new possibilities and vistas from the point of view of participatory governance and development in India and other developing nations. India is heading in the right direction with the expansion of new media and application of new media. The telecommunication, satellite communication and computer communication applications have become highly relevant and useful in the new millennium. The Indian National Tasks Force on Information Technology and Software Development should be equipped with the state of the art facilities, financial resources, man power, functional autonomy and other privileges to enrich the process of participatory development in the country. The incidence of cyber crimes should be checked in order to protect public interest and national sovereignty in the present times.

The new media have transformed the environment remarkably. Even ordinary people possess a deeper understanding of life, environment and other aspects of business with the help of new media. This tendency will increase in the future since the new media have created an 'information society' which tends to erase the distinction between subject specialists and ordinary people. The globalization of knowledge has become an inevitable historical process and functions as a rearrangement of world systems.

New Media and Dalits

The world has witnessed commendable new media revolution, knowledge expansion and interactive communication. The

new media have transcended the geographical boundaries which has eliminated social restrictions. Truly, information technology is the common denominator that links people regardless of region, religion, caste, color, creed, race or political alignments. The central and state governments are required to work together to widen the base of new media, promote new media literacy, enlist active participation of people in development activities, check corruption in development projects and empower the information have nots in the country.

A substantial amount of research has been carried out on the impact of globalization on new media management in general and new media applications in particular in India and abroad. The review of literature clearly indicates that adequate scientific investigations were not carried out in India with a focus on new media access and utility among Dalits in India.

The new communication technologies should be judiciously used as instruments of participatory communication and development in India. The intelligent and active application of new media including the social media for various developmental endeavors should be ensured by the government and other stakeholders of sustainable, integrated and inclusive development across the country. The Indian National Tasks Force on Information Technology and Software Development should be equipped with the state of the art facilities, financial resources, man power, functional autonomy and other privileges to enrich the process of participatory development in the country.

Conclusion

In the new millennium, new media application assumes great significance from the points of view of participatory communication and development. There is a visible digital divide across the globe which has impeded the development of the mankind. The role of new media in the processes of social change and economic development is now widely recognized by the scholars and policy makers all over the globe. India has achieved commendable progress in the field of new media management. The crucial role of new media in the empowerment of Dalits becomes clear since the society moves towards a knowledge – based and development – oriented society. Ambedkar fought for the integrated development of India and empowerment of women and weaker sections. He had firmly believed that social inequality would jeopardize political freedom and democracy. He had also called upon the media to function as angel guardians of public interest. His perspective on the role of media in national development is widely acknowledged as highly progressive by the media scholars.

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