Dalits and Computer Literacy- A Case Study of Shivamogga Taluk

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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.

Keywords: *dalits, computer, literacy and new media*

1. 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 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).

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). Neuman (1991) 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.

The new media have opened up avenues for the users to reach out to new people, access ideas, plan or organized campaigns. It has also helped users in airing their difficulties and to sympathize and even share and offer solutions for problems.

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).

2. 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?"

3. Objectives of the Study

3.1 General

to find out the levels of new media reach and how dalit communities access them and utilize them with what perceived impact.

3.2 Specifically

To assess the reach and access of new media devices and services like DTH / Cable TV, mobile, computers, internet and OTT.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. Review of Literature

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) pointed out that the effects of media were determined by the technology themselves, rather than the complex social networks.

Biocca (2000) 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.

7. 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 million 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.

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'.

As per ITUs worlds telecommunication/ICT indicates database, only 43 per cent of the population in uses internet. The IAMAI- Kantar report ICUBE-2020 suggests that, there are 58% male internet and 42% female internet users in India (IAMAI, 2022). Mac Bride Commission (1980) also had noted the expanding information divide.

8. 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.

9. Dalits in India
In India there is a hierarchy of social status that is attached to various castes which ranged from worship to untouchability. Dalits are the former untouchables- popularly known as lower caste/ impure people/downtrodden. In the late sixties and seventies, vibrant mass movements of these oppressed castes adopted the name dalit (Halu, 2009).

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.

10. 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, de - notified 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. Brewer (2007) studied on the challenges of technology for developing skills. Leung (2008) assessed the voyage from "victims of the digital divide" to "techno elites".
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.

11. 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 Computers, 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.

12. 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 which is 274 kms away from Bengaluru, the capital of the state. It consists of seven taluks 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.
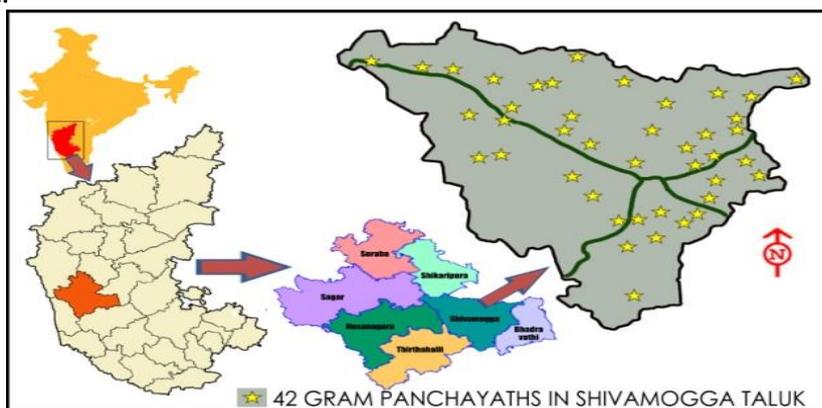

Fig. 1. Map of the Research Location showing 42 panchayats

13. 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.

14. Research methods

The study was quantitative in nature. To study Dalits and Computer Literacy a Case Study of Shivamogga Taluk, 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.
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.

15. 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 and DNO representatives. The gathered data have been analyzed, discussed and presented below.

16. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic information of respondents such as educational qualification, gender, age groups, social background were found to be important for studying the reach and access and utilization of new media. Important aspects of the demographic profile are given below.

PART A

RQ: Access and utilization of computer technology 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
Computer technology and the dalits

Table 3. Computer ownership at home

Mode of Computer Ownership	Nos.	Percentage
Desk top / Lap-top owned	53	13.25
Bought Personally	39	9.75
Availed through Govt./ NGOs	14	3.5
Alternate Devices Used	49	12.25
Tablet used as computer	3	0.75
Smart phone used as computer	46	11.5
No computer at home	298	74.5
Grand Total	400	100.00

As shown by Table 3, among the 400 respondents 53 (13.5%) of the respondents owned a computer in the form of a lap-top or desk top, of which 39 were bought personally and 14 availed through various government / NGO schemes. Among those who did not own a computer 49 (12.25%) were using tablet or smart phones as computers. However, 298 (74.5%) never had the benefit of a computer in their house.

Table 4. Computer ownership by various dalit groups

SC Sub-group	Access by			Total
	Desk top / Lap-top	Alternate Devices	No Computer	
Adi Karnataka	37	28	221	286
Adi Dravida	09	15	32	56
Koracha / Korama	01	00	12	13
Lambani / Banjara	05	05	32	42
Marathi SC	01	01	00	02
Bhovi	00	00	01	01
Total	53	49	298	400

Access computer by the dalit groups, among 400 respondents, 53 had Desk top / laptop and 49 accesses through alternative devices.

Out of the 53 respondents who owned a Laptop / Desk top, 37 Adi Karnata respondents had Desk top/Lap-top and followed by 9 Adi Dravida; 1 Koracha / Korama; 5 Lambani and 1 Marathi SC accessed it.

Among the 49 respondents who used tablet or mobile phone in place of a computer, 28 Adi Karnataka were among the top, followed by 15 Adi Dravida; 5 Lambani and one with Marathi SC. However, 221Adi Karnataka; 32 Adi Dravida; 12 Koracha/Korama; 32 Lambani and Bhovi 1 respondents claimed that they did not have computers.

Table 5. Mode of alternate access to computer
Respondents who had computer at home and those who did not have had been accessing computer at various other places at times.

Alternate computer Access	Nos.	Percentage
Cyber Café	334	83.5
Share Friends Computer	21	5.25
No response	45	11.25
Total	400	100.00

About 334 (83.50%) responded they would visit cyber café, 21 (5.25%) of them would share friends' computer. However, 45 respondents had never sought (11.25%) any of these provisions.

17. Conclusions
17.1 Reach and access of computer
Among the 400 respondents 53 (13.25%) of the respondents owned a computer in the form of a lap-top or desk top, of which 39 were bought personally and 14 availed through various government / NGO schemes. Those who did not own a computer 49 (12.25%) were using tablet or smart phones as alternative. However, 298 never had the benefit of a computer in their house.

All India level only 11 percent household had owned a computer according to CBGA (2020). This shows that computer ownership among the dalits in this study is well above the national average. Further about 12 percent were accessing computer related services through their mobile phone.

18. Recommendations
Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made.
A. To Dalit [development] Organizations
Dalit organizations shall work with government and NGOs to give adequate media awareness and ensure media literacy.
They may disseminate news and views covered about dalits and dalit issues.
They shall identify fake news and intervene to ensure communal / intergroup harmony.
B. To Government and NGOs
Government / NGOs must initiate media / computer training / media awareness programs / skill training at Gram Panchayat level.
Establish and strengthen the local dalit youth forums to monitor the new media related activities and initiate positive actions.
C. To Educational Institutions

Educational institutions – colleges and universities – can encourage media literacy campaigns for villagers including dalits.

D. For Further Research

The present study was limited to a taluk in a district. The research can be replicated to other areas, even regional or national level to understand the reality better. The further studies also may compare the access and utilization patterns with non-dalit respondents to differentiate the unique realities of the phenomenon.

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