

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT



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About The Journal

The International Journal of Communication Development is a new journal devoted to the analysis of communication, mass media and development in a global context in both Indian and international perspective. Authors are encouraged to submit high quality, original works which have not appeared, nor are under consideration, in other journals.

The International Journal of Communication Development examines the way in which similarities and differences open up scope for discussion, research and application in the field of communication, mass media and development. This journal seeks innovative articles, utilizing critical and empirical approaches regarding global communication including, but not limited to, systems, structures, processes, practices and cultures. These articles could deal with content, as well as its production, consumption and effects, all of which are situated within inter- and trans-national, cross-cultural, inter-disciplinary and especially comparative perspectives.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

When Claire Wardel of First Draft News rejected the term Fake News she said it was woefully inadequate and put forth the term Information Pollution. We in India are seeing this form of pollution which we still prefer to call Fake News spreading its tentacles from every sphere of society into every nook and corner of the country and who else but social media to blame which is the messenger and self styled experts and citizen journalists becoming the message creators. Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and blogs are full of information which can neither be authenticated nor prevented from spreading like wild fire.

To the age old problem of planted false news which resulted into misinformation and dis-information there is a new concept of mal-information. The first one being false information created without harmful intent, second one created and spread with harmful intent and the third one is sharing of genuine information with harmful intent.

As research Scholars and students of mass communication we should be able to identify fake news for two reasons. First being its ability to hamper genuine literature review and second is making us gullible to use doctored content which might result into plagiarism charges and legal repercussions. Research papers and articles are not devoid of these problems in today's academic world.

So how do we identify this fake news? Our first step should be to do a fact check on the source and try to understand its mission and purpose. Second step should be to not leave the story after reading the headline but read the complete story to understand. Third step should be to check the authenticity of the authors and try and confirm their credibility. An important step after this would be to access the supporting claims and their sources. As fake news is a major inline phenomenon checking the date of publication is important to see if the story is relevant and updated.

Then come the psychological nuances which need to be satisfied. So ask yourself- is it a joke or a satire? They story could have no potential to harm but the ability to fool and should be taken with a pinch of salt. Once satisfied see if the story is not creating a bias in you and affecting your judgment. Asking experts on the subject is also a good idea to reach any conclusion. Once satisfied cross check if the headlines, content, visuals and captions are in sync or not.

As communicators we should be able to identify misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual and be able to understand genuine content is shared with false contextual information or non-existent sources. Also in today's world the most important are three terms impostor content where genuine sources are impersonated with false sources, manipulated content when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive and fabricated content where new content which is 100% false is created to deceive and harm.

At IJCD we have pledged to not let fake news remove true news from its role in conducting genuine research and writing good research papers. We aim to not let it deter our research abilities and content from their true path in journalism and communication development.

Dr. Durgesh Tripathi
Editor, IJCD

E –GOVERNANCE AND IT'S ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

“Governance” is a vital component of sustainable development for a country. Traditional information systems have primarily focused on supplying information but it is now recognized that past systems have been largely ineffective in addressing the needs of the rural poor. Advanced state of information technology in form of e –Governance has helped redefine the way in which the government functions. India has been a pioneer in articulating strong vision for e-Governance .The Government of India has launched the National e–Governance plan (NeGP) with the intent to support 22 projects over the next 3-4 years by both state and central government. As a part of the goal for adopting e–Governance, West Bengal has introduced significant computerization at various levels in several government departments and has been successful to implement several citizen friendly e-Governance projects like GPMS, issuance of birth and death certificates, trade licenses, e SEVA, e-tendering, Vahan and Sarathi, Bhumi, Bhuchitra, Hospital Management Information System and Store Management Information system, electoral governance incorporating all walks of life and help build trust, collaboration and engage people’s participation. Several departments of Information Technologies and Electronics, the State e-Governance missions team (SeMT), National Informatics centre, (NIC), West Bengal State Wide Area Network (WBSWAN), state data centres (WEBEL), Common Service Centres (CSC) or Tathyamitra Kendra’s and kiosks set up by the Government of West Bengal has been set up to spear head e-Governance in every nook and corner of the state.e-Governance in West Bengal is still at it’s nascent stage. My paper aims to study e–Governance initiatives in the state of West Bengal., it’s major advantages , analyze it’s e-Readiness Index ,critically analyze the e –Governance implementation scenario and help identify it’s scope of improvement in popularizing it.

Key words: ICT,e –Governance,Sustainable Development

Introduction

India Today stands at the cusp of development. The progress in and application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and their related infrastructure apparatus on governance have transformed the life of citizens in modern society. Though India ranks 87th in UN’s e readiness index, India like other forward looking and developed economies has travelled critical distance in the field of planning and implementation of e-Governance in government-people interface process.

e-Governance refers to the application of Information Technologies by government agencies to enable improved governance relations with citizens, business and administrators of the government. This would indirectly lead to improved public administration with greater transparency and convenience and easy access to economic and social opportunities, revenue growth with less corruption.

The efforts of National Informatics Centres (NIC) to connect all district headquarters is considered very significant in development of e-Governance in India. The national e-Governance plan (NeGP) is the lead nodal agency for implementing e-Governance in India. The prime objective of NeGP of Government of India is to make all Government services easily available and accessible through common service delivery outlets to the common man in his locality through and ensure efficient, transparent and reliable services at affordable costs to meet the basic needs of the common man. The NeGP through its three tier functional model clearly delineated into three Mission Mode Projects (MMP's) viz. Central Mission Mode, State MMP's and integrated MMP's to ensure successful implementations and monitoring of e-Governance projects. The NeGP has formulated 27 MMP's and the projects are clearly defined with measurable outcomes and service levels and cover almost all areas of administrations and departments of governance.

Among the Indian States, South Indian States lead top position in e-readiness index of e-Governance in India and practice highly developed e-Governance applications, like e-SEVA and SMART projects in Andhra Pradesh, BHOOMI projects in Karnataka and SARI Projects in Tamil Nadu. Among the North Indian States, Delhi stands in the first position followed by Gujrat. West Bengal is no exception and it too witnesses several e –Governance initiatives undertaken. Several departments of Information Technologies and Electronics, the State e-Governance missions team (SeMT), National Informatics centre, (NIC), West Bengal State Wide Area Network (WBSWAN), state data centres (WEBEL), Common Service Centres (CSC) or Tathyamitra Kendra's and kiosks set up by West Bengal government to spear head the incorporation of e-Governance in every nook and corner of the state.

Aim of the Study

To study e-Governance in rural West Bengal and explore its immense potential in contributing to sustainable development of the state.

Objective of the Study

The major objectives of my the study will be –

1. To analyze West Bengal's e-Readiness Index for sustainable development in West Bengal

2. To study e-Governance initiatives in the state of West Bengal.
3. To understand the major advantages of application of e-Governance initiatives.
4. To critically analyze the e-Governance implementation scenario and help identify the scope of improvement.
5. To study and suggest recommendations for greater incorporation of e-Governance initiatives for social inclusion to help people enhance their lives in West Bengal.

Literature Review:

The present study scans the available literature and previous research work conducted by different researchers on e-Governance. The literature on e-Governance in West Bengal' is however scanty.

Singla, M.L. **"Who needs e-Governance? India or Bharat?"** Business Rural India, Issue : 2, Volume 1, April, 2005 promotes e-Commerce and ensure transparency leading to overall development of the economy by bridging the gap between rural an urban masses.Ghosh, A.; and Arora, N. (2005), **"Role of e-Governance Effective Frameworks Implemenation"**, Proceedings of the International Conference on e-Governance Lahore University of Management Science, Lahore, Pakistan, brought out that e-Governance has been implemented in isolation by different states and there is a need of nationalized level framework which would rather help to increase effectiveness of different isolated efforts made by individual states..Ghosh A. and Banerjee G. (2006), **"Study of e-Governance in rural India"**, International Conference on e-Governance (ICEG -2006), December, 2006, IIT Delhi carried out their study on e-Governance in rural India constituting majority (70%) of the Indian population. He emphasized the benefits that farmers can draw out of e-Governance projects through which they can come to know of current crop price, get help to prevent crop from diseases and through internet services sell products directly, eliminate the cost incurred by the middlemen. In this study he rightly pointed out the lack of citizen participation in e-Governance projects and policies owing to failure of security measures to check disclosure of personal information.Sudalaimuthu, S.; and Sivakumar, B. (2006), **"E-Filing of Income Tax in India"**, Gumbad Business Review, Vol. 2, No. 2, elaborated the concept of e-filing of income tax returns through internet and rightly pointed out certain limitations such as slow processing of speed.Chaudhri, N.; and Dash, S.S. (2006), **"Community Information Centres"**, Sage Governance Publications, discussed how Community Information Centres, an e-Governance initiative of eight north-eastern remote states of India have benefited through services like internet browsing, word processing and training provided through Community Information Centres (CICs).Guoetal, S (2007), **"Very**

Low-Cost Internet Access Using Kiosk Net",ACM Sigcomm Computer Communication Review, Vol. 37, No. 5, October in his research publication helped disclose the scope and provision of low cost internet access to rural areas through kiosks. Gessi, T. (2007), **"Effective Implementation of e-Governance in Technical Institutions in India using ICT to Make them World Class"** , An International Journal of Engineering Sciences , Vol. 4, September, introduced e-Governance framework after reviewing and analyzing the ICT case studies. Shingare, S. (2008), **"e-Governance at Village Level Administration (In Rural India)"**, World Conference on Agricultural Information and IT, explored the role of e-Governance in development of rural India. He opined that e-Governance could contribute immensely in the overall growth of the nation's development by ensuring development of the gram panchayat that constitute the units of governance. He supported his statements by providing examples such as case studies where e-Governance played an important role in competitive and fast-paced development in village by providing a platform of information exchange reliability at village level. Singh, S. (2010), **"Promoting e-Governance through Right to Information: A Case-Study of India"**, International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research (IJSER), Vol. 1, No. 2, November advocates e-Governance in India through Right to Information ensuring improved interaction between citizens and the government. Dwivedi, S.K.; and Bharti, A.K. (2010), **"e-Governance in India – Problems and Acceptability"**, Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology identified the major reasons for ineffective governance as poverty, technical illiteracy, unawareness, shortage of infrastructure and language dominance through the study of certain e-Governance initiatives in Karnataka viz. CARD, Gyandoot, Bhoomi and Vahan and Sarathi. Ghosh, A. (2011), **"Initiatives in ICT for Rural Development: An Indian Perspective"**, Global Media Journal, Vol. 2, No. 2, December emphasized the importance of information kiosks and the vital role of ICT played in rural information dissemination. Salkute, V.R.; and Kolhe, S.R. (2011), **"e-Government Milestone in Rural India: e-Agro Aspects"**, International Journal of Enterprise Computing and Business Systems, Vol. 1, No. 2, July in their work elaborates the scope of e-Governance in rural India and highlights the advantages of "e-Choupal" initiative in India. Singh, V.; and Chander, S. (2012), **"On the Role of e-Governance in Economic Development (An Impact Study of Rural and Semi-Urban Punjab)"**, International Journal of Computing and Business Research (IJCBR), Vol. 3, No. 1, January in their research paper elaborated how e-Governance can be used for socio economic development of an agricultural based state like that of Punjab.

Research Methodology:

To facilitate the study of e-Governance in rural West Bengal and explore its immense potential in contributing to sustainable development of the state, an exploratory research method was adopted. Data for the study were collected from 150 respondents and beneficiaries of civil society from block offices of West Bengal in the form of a cross

sectional survey through a random ,non-probability snowball and convenience sampling technique. Kolkata representing the urban section was kept out of study. The sample selection was based to ensure holistic study and fair representation of all age groups, gender bias, reserved and minority communities of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the muslims, educational background, work status and income level of civil society across all districts of the State. Focus group conducted with e –Governance administrators helped in better understanding of the problems in implementation and thereby contributed to recommending good suggestions in enhancing better incorporation of e-Governance in the state facilitating enhanced quality of life and sustainable development.

Major Findings and Observations:

a. e –Readiness Index for e –Governance in West Bengal :

e- Governance adopted by the panchayats in West Bengal through various incorporation of several ICT applications marks the onset of the next phase of democratization and decentralization in Bengal. It is only with e-Governance that local governance is now an experienced reality with far reaching potential for delivery of social services of government administration .

West Bengal is divided into 19 districts governed by a District Collectorate or District Magistrate and subdivided into subdivisions, 341 blocks and 3349 town municipalities or gram panchayats. The Government of West Bengal through the State e- mission team (SeMT) working in line with National e-Governance plan (NeGP) has been successful to implement several citizen friendly e-Governance projects incorporating all walks of life. The efforts of National Informatics Centres (NIC) to connect all district headquarters through NICNET and WBSWAN, is the State’s Information Highway and is considered very significant e-Governance development in West Bengal. The state Portal "Banglarmukh" has been restructured and launched on April 15,2009 in new format from WBSWAN State Head quarter and is made available through url www.banglarmukh.gov.in or www.westbengal.gov.in. e-Governance Service Delivery Gateways which act as standards-based messaging switches provide seamless exchange of data across the departments between state portal and state department services help consolidate services, applications and infrastructure to provide efficient electronic delivery of G2G, G2C and G2B services through common delivery platform such as State Wide Area Network (SWAN) and Common Service Centre (CSC). Webel and the Information Technology Department acts as the state data centre and acts as the central repository of the state. The major functions would include secure storage and delivery of data and services, citizen information portal, state intranet portal, disaster recovery, service integration. In West Bengal the Common Services Centres have been named as “TathyaMitra” and 6,797 such centres are being established covering rural

areas of 18 districts. Out of 6797 Tathya Mitra centres the state government decided to have one at each of the 3,349 gram panchayats and 341 Block/Panchayat Samiti offices. Remaining 3,105 CSCs are scheduled to be set up at private locations considering 10,000 populations per CSC. The West Bengal State Rural Development Agency (WBSRDA) of the Panchayats & Rural Development Department has been selected as the State Designated Agency (SDA) and is primarily designated for implementation of the CSC scheme in the State through SREI Sahaj e -village Ltd. The Tathya Mitra Kendra's in West Bengal are usually 100 -150 sqft space with some basic infrastructure like one or two computer terminals or laptops with connectivity to internet, a printer, an inverter or a generator system.

b. The major e -Governance initiatives in West Bengal :

1. GPMS (Gram Panchayat Management System) and IFMS (Integrated Fund Management System)-

The basic objective of introducing GPMS and IFMS is to improve financial management and provide better service to the citizens of West Bengal. GPMS (Gram Panchayat Management System) is the software developed for the gram panchayats and is majorly focused on standardizing the accounting system of PRI's, management of accounts, easy uploading of the abstract of the accounts generated head wise balance of fund uploaded after each month in the website of the Panchayat and Rural Development Department www.wbprd.nic.in. GPMS not only enables easy monitoring of funds by district and block level authorities but helps in rendering several citizen centric services viz. issue of birth and death certificates, assessment of tax on land and buildings, issue of trade certificates. Similar to GPMS , IFMS (Integrated Fund Management System) is the software for maintaining accounts and treasury of the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad .

2. e-SEBA

e-SEBA is the software for provident fund management scheme for the state of West Bengal. The software deals with all kinds of the accounting job including generation of individual slips, office registers and other statements and currently handles data related to 133 lakh rural households , more than 5 lakh IAY beneficiaries, 11 lakh old age pensioners, around 3 lakh other pensioners, 9 lakh PROFLAL beneficiaries.

3. Caste certificate

The web enabled process of caste certification of the state of West Bengal aims to create a single window access to certifications by all citizens as a proof of a person's representation to certain caste.

4.e-TENDERING and e-PROCUREMENT –

e-procurement /e-tendering software of NIC is fully operationalized in procurement .The steps included in the process of e-tendering and e-procurement as designed by the Panchayat and Rural Development of West Bengal include publication of tender in the website of the department,submission of bid by contractors electronically and automatic assessment of the bid by the software for finalizing contract.The details of the contractors are uploaded and they are trained to submitting on line bid. The procurement time has been reduced by around two months per contract and improved transparency.AllZillaParishads compulsorily publish their tenders in website of the department. Digital certificates is given to relevant functionaries

5. Vahan –Sarathi (Vehicle Registration)-

VAHAN is a highly flexible and comprehensive software for vehicle registration of the Public Vehicles Department in West Bengal and it majorly caters to all transactions related to vehicle registration like that of calculation of fees and tax for private and commercial vehicles, vehicle registration for private and commercial vehicles, fitness test for commercial vehicles and other vehicle transactions such transfer, conversion, alteration, online payment of road tax etc. On the contrary SARATHI software has been implemented to issue computerized learner license, permanent driving license, conductor license and driving school license, learner license, permanent driving license, conductor license and driving school establishment license to the citizens. The software provides a nationwide search over the digitized data of registered vehicles and common citizens can view the details of their registered vehicles online based on certain parameters like registration number or chassisnumber etc.

6. Employment Exchange –

Through its online presence,Employment Exchange acts as a web based interactive central digital platform and transparent window to the recruitment of government official in West Bengal.It provides an online interactive central digital platform for interface of employers with prospective job seekers and primarily aims at enhancement of placement opportunities of job seekers and secondarily at removing the gap that exists in skill mismatch.The portal provides online registrationrenewal and updation for job seekers,online data bank of prospective employees,skill development training programmes,vocational courses,mock tests and special coaching for various competitive examinations and promote entrepreneur programmes.

7.Commercial Taxes ad Treasuries –

The electronic filing of the value added tax across West Bengal marks the onset of new web enabled era and includes e –ventures and invoice details,e–declarations for movement of goods through States commercial tax check posts,e -filling of VAT returns,CSTReturns,SST returns,e-payment through bank portal,e-registration and DEMAT RC, de materialized waybill for registered dealers and un registered persons, e-submission of declaration for deemed assessment,e-refund and payment through ECS, dematerialized CST Forms(C&F),dematerialized transit declaration, e-application and submission of CST forms,e-application for industrial promotion assistance scheme,e-Submission of Form 16,e-grievance,e-filing of entry tax return, e-registration of digital signature certificate collection of sales taxes,exciseduties,motor vehicle tax

7.AGRISNET(AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION SYSYEMS NETWORK) –

is an online integrated, market driven multi nodal delivery of agricultural information system in West Bengal aiming to enhance agricultural information flow.The project envisages creation of a sustainable data bank of all agricultural inputs like market demands, prices,good agricultural practices facilitating farmers and other stakeholders through agri–business centres to interact with agricultural service providers in the governmental sectors.The major applications of Agrisnet include fertilizer control and management system ,seed management information system ,soil survey soil and water conservation and management system, soil test based fertilizer recommendation system ,issuance of soil health card ,weather watch information system, information system on pesticide availability, management and pesticide testing.

9.Bhumi / Bhuchitra/ LAIS(Land Acquisition Information System) –

Bhumi was the first version of the land records computerization software developed by NIC, West Bengal. The software has been installed in all the Land and Land Reforms Offices in 341 blocks and majorly concentrates on due validation and checking of database of khatians and plots. Citizens are provided with computerized records of Rights (RoR), paper based mouza volumes after digital correction, certified copy and plot information within 15 minutes. **Bhuchitra** is an upgraded version of Bhumi with integration of digitized mouza map.**LIAS** software helps store data relating to project details,plotdetails,owner details and primarily aims at quick disposal of all land acquisition cases.Reports relating to notification,declaration,landschedule,estimate,calculationsheets,awardpreparation,payment notices,C.C vouchers and many other required reports and queries are available in the software.

10.Store Management Information System and Hospital Management Information System:

The Health Statistics Information Portal of West Bengal facilitates the flow of physical and financial performance from the district level to the state headquarters and the center using a web based Health Management Information System (HMIS) interface. The portal aims to provide periodic reports on the status of the health sector in the state. While Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) is used for online tracking of outdoor and indoor ticketing, Store Management Information system (SMIS) is the software used for medicine procurement in all hospitals in West Bengal. SMS and telecommunication technologies are used for OPD tracking system and the Mother and Child tracking system is used for sick and new born health care centres. Two telemedicine projects have already been implemented by Webel ECS Ltd in collaboration with IIT, Kharagpur at various government hospitals of the states of West Bengal whereby the medical history of the patient is sent to the higher centres via internet facility.

11. e –DISTRICT PROJECT–

The e-District project endeavors to create an integrated IT platform for district administration and its subordinate offices through Common Service Centres (CSC). An approach based on Service Oriented Architecture (SoA) it makes it easy for the district administrative officials to discharge their functions efficiently. Pilot projects of e –Governance are being implemented in Jalpaiguri, Bankura and Burdwan Districts. After successful rollout of the pilot project, the remaining districts of West Bengal would be covered under the project. Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) has prepared the functional requirement specifications while TCS is the identified development agency for the e-District project in the state. Implementation of the pilot started from October'09.

12. Computerization of Salary Accounts (COSA) –

COSA or Computerization of Salary Accounts is the project implemented in the Finance Department, West Bengal that ensures precision and timeliness in the generation of pay bills, schedules and other annexure required for producing salary bills of the establishments of government departments. COSA is running successfully in around two thousand DDO offices in West Bengal. COSA has bagged good e-Governance project award in the Microsoft Government Leadership Summit 2007 held in New Delhi.

13. Electoral Governance –

General Elections of 2009 and has been a landmark change in the evolution of West Bengal elections with Election Commission incorporating ICT technologies in electoral process of computerization of electoral rolls of 620 million voters incorporating their photo identity, it's constant upgradation, supervision of nomination of candidates, online supervision of nomination of candidates, registration of political parties, issuing appointment letters to

individuals, declaring results online, publishing CD's and books of individual parliamentary constituency rolls.

14. Department of Higher Education –

To ensure universal facilities and universal access to information, the Government of West Bengal in its official website of BanglarMukh(<http://wb.gov.in/>) has gone for online application, model answers, feedback and results for students enrolled for primary as well as higher education and competitive exams inclusive of West Bengal Joint Entrance and TET. Other than this there are constant on line scholarship announcements (like Swami Vivekananda West Bengal Government merit cum Means scholarship scheme), e-notice boards and e-RTI is a regular exercise with the education department of West Bengal.

c. The major advantages of e –Governance in West Bengal :

It's major benefits would encompass the following:

1. Bridging the existent digital divide in India through emerging digital techniques resulting in improved communication and access to economic and social opportunities in public administration management
2. Encourages proper and active citizen representation their participation
3. Corruption reduction, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth and cost reduction.
4. Improves efficiency in processing large quantities of data.
5. Improve services through better understanding of user's requirements, thus aiming for seamless online services.
6. Help achieve specific policy outcomes by enabling stakeholders to share information and ideas.
7. Assist government's economic policy objectives by promoting productivity gains internet in ICT and e-Commerce.
8. Contribute to government reform by improving transparency, facilitating information sharing and highlighting internal inconsistencies.
9. Help in building trusts between government and the citizens and involve citizens in policy processing.
10. Cheap and enhanced accessibility of information .

11. Increased participatory approaches to Government departments and citizens

c.Recommendations for accelerating e –Governance initiatives in West Bengal :

The focus group and surveys across 150 respondents and beneficiaries helped gain better insights to e –Governance implementation scenario in West Bengal in respect to the various demographic parameters affecting e –Governance like age, gender bias, work status and monthly income and likewise help identify and recommend the areas of further enhancement for its better incorporation into our everyday life.

The survey findings helped establish a strong and direct relationship of age group with the rate of acceptance of e –Governance initiatives. The middle age group of 18 -30 and 30 -40 years showed better acceptance of e-Governance applications in comparison to age group above 60. The surveys further revealed that the male respondents with higher education exhibited a higher acceptance of e-Governance initiatives. The surveys helped conclude that e-Governance services were restricted or marginalized with an average income bracket of 1,000 -5,000. People with low income as well as with high income usually were out of the domain of e-Governance. Respondents who were earning and majorly comprising of household workers or self-employed were seen to constitute the majority of beneficiaries.

For better incorporation of the various e –Governance initiatives, the government policy towards ICT at grassroots and local level needs to be re-orientated with significant budgetary allocation for ICT infrastructure development . It should be coupled with better state administrative backup for implementation and maintenance. A dedicated e-Governance committee should be constituted for spearheading e-Governance in local bodies and effective measures incorporated to develop public trust. For this purpose strong campaigns emphasizing strong security of online data should be organized by government and local bodies. To promote ICT usage in public life, the Government of West Bengal should make it legally mandatory that all registered parties should have an active website and with proper guidelines to the daily operation of such websites. Also distribution of free laptops and mobile at various blocks of the state along with establishment and maintenance of greater number of village kiosks and CSC's as platforms for new media access to citizens residing in remote corners would be a good way to promote e –Governance in the State. Along with it accessibility to bengali software's on new media platforms would help encourage more participatory and interactive nature addressing local concerns. Consistent computer literacy programs along with attitudinal training programs aimed to skill training and capacity building should be emphasized and worked out on regular basis.

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BUYER'S RIGHT AND PRODUCT INFORMATION: A STUDY ON DISPLAYING SAR VALUE OF BUDGET SMART PHONES

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Abstract

Being always “connected” by spending vast amount of time on Smartphone is a common perception of this age and the generation. The reports of the PIB and the Time i.e. India has the second-largest mobile phone users and world’s second largest smart phone market with over 900 million users in the world (PIB,2012 and Time, 2014). The reports show vast mobile phone penetration in India and if, anyhow, the health risk is associated with the usage of mobile phones will affect the whole country and the users particularly. All mobile phones emit electromagnetic field (EMF), normally non-ionized to connect the mobile phone to the base stations. This exposure to radio frequency (RF) energy is the main concern of many countries as it may cause many health issues. Hence, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC, US) has fixed the limit of Specific Absorption Rate (**SAR**) for mobile phones. But many manufactures avoid this limit and even, perhaps, buyers are unaware about this safety indicator. Over exposure to radio frequency, even if it is non-ionized, is one of the causes of numerous health risks such as Alzheimer, Genotoxic Effects, Ocular Effects, Psychological Effects and Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity. This may also lead to Cancer. Thus, even a small impact on health by mobile usage could have major public health consequences. This paper reviews the presentation approach of online shopping websites regarding SAR value of budget smart phones and also analyses the priorities of publicizing other alluring features of smart phones. This paper aims to answer; do the online shopping websites display the SAR value of budget smart phones sold on it and whether the information of SAR value is conveyed in a proper way? Content analysis of top two online shopping websites in India will be done to come back with.

Keywords: Mobile Radio Frequency, SAR value, Budget Smart Phones and Online Shopping Sites.

Introduction

Knowledge is the power and information is the basic building block of the knowledge. So, information is also considered as link to power. Having knowledge or information is

empowerment. Therefore, Information is the first requirement to have the power wished by individual, group of people or mass. In other words, it is the information that turns into knowledge when someone's mind applied to it and he further takes action to be empowered.

Information is message which is diffused to the intended target with a view to inform, educate and stimulate for the action. Individual or mass have the right to know especially about the goods they are buying. The message or information is share/diffused to make the people aware about the content shared with them. The proper information leads individual or mass towards taking apt decision about the action like using or buying goods and services. Hence, marketing specifically marketing communication is no exception to this. The consumer is considered to be the king. The kingship of the consumer cannot sustain without the right to know about the features, merits and demerits of the products and services while taking the decision about purchasing or using these. Goods and services might have negative impact in terms of its uses. This aspect must be shared with consumer and buyers.

Technological breakthroughs have paved the way for innovation. These innovations have revolutionized the modern society, specifically communication and telecommunication technologies have changed the societies spread over the world. In such innovative technologies, cell or mobile phone is one that has enrooted so deeply in the society that people spend their vast time with it. The smart phone has brought a lot of comforts in the life of common people. But, at the same time it has created new challenges and threats for them. Excessive exposure or uses of the cell phone poses a threat to human health. It may cause several fatal diseases. The biggest threat of the cell or mobile phone is the emission to the radiation as all mobile phones emit electromagnetic field (EMF) to connect the phone to base stations to render desired service like calling, internet etc. on the basis of radio frequency allotted. Exposure to the radiation over a certain limit i.e.1.6 w/kg (limit adopted in India) may cause diseases like cancer etc. to the user. Hence, it becomes pertinent that buyer of the cell phone must know how much radiation is emitting from the phone brand while he is purchasing. The rate of the radiation exposure is measured which is termed as **SAR**. The SAR is Specific Absorption Rate that determines at which rate the radio waves emitted from the cell phone absorbed by the user's body. Therefore, it is necessary for the producers/makers of the mobile phones and POS (point of sale) places to share the SAR with buyers. The sharing of the message/information regarding SAR must be transparent and noticeable manner whether it is a user manual, display of mobile features or advertisements.

This paper tries to find out whether the SAR information is shared with the consumer or buyer as POS and whether the information of SAR value is conveyed in a proper way? This is an exploratory research and the study is based on secondary data. The content analysis method has been applied to analyze the data.

Review of Literature

i- Rule to sell mobile phones in Belgium is ‘As from 1 March 2014, the radiation value (SAR value) of all types of mobile phones (ordinary mobile phones and smart phones) must be indicated by the seller: a. at the point of sale and for distance sales, through the internet; b. in advertising materials, if other technical specifications are included also.’ (**Guide selling mobile phones Version 6, 2014**). It is clearly mentioned that seller has to provide SAR information.

ii-Monika Dubey, 2013 advocates about the information of SAR values should be provided at the point of sale and all mobile handsets sold in India should be checked for compliance of the SAR limit.

iii-National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD states three concerns that how mobile phone is associated with health risk- Parts of the human body nearest to the antenna (brain) can absorb radio frequency emitted by mobile phone, Mobile phone penetration and time spent on it is increasing rapidly and increasing number of base stations.

iv-Recent research on EMF and Health risk, 2014 tries to answer that it is unresolved or not clear that extremely low frequency magnetic field have any influence on causing leukemia and alzimers. As direct influences are not very clear hence it is too early to draw firm conclusion that extremely low frequency has adverse impact on humans.

v-The cell phone problem, EHHL,2012- this report says that rather than talking and messaging the smart phones are used for many other activities like gaming, downloading and using internet based mobile application, which leads to spend higher time in radio frequency radiation. Even gamers spend longer time on mobile than other users. The report shows that having close proximity of mobile phone to human head has a concern of brain tumor and has Adverse impact on memory retention, reproduction, genotoxic effect/ cell damage, ocular effect (effect on retina), psychological effect as user get addicted with mobile phones, electromagnetic hypersensitivity

The report recommends “A person who is text messaging, accessing the internet, or using a “hands-free” device will have lower exposure to RF energy than someone holding the phone against his or her head. Non-ionizing radiation, with long wavelength and low frequency, does not break chemical bonds, but has sufficient energy to move electrons and heat body tissue, leading to biological effects at certain doses.” It also recommends that there is need for low cost RF Measurement devices which can monitor the presence of intensity of RF.

vi-Michael H. Repacholi, 2001 argues that rapid growth of mobile phone and reduction in fixed-lines phones has raised the concern across the world that RF from mobile phones may

affect people's health and as the penetration of mobile phones and base stations are increasing at rapid rate in the world so adverse effect on health may raise the worldwide concern.

vii-Varshney, Malhotra, Sharma and Aggarwal, 2018 advocate that awareness about SAR of mobile phones to the consumers is need of the hour and the information of SAR value should be available on manufacturer's website, in the mobile manual and at the POS (point of sale). As per their survey study the awareness about the SAR value among mobile users are very less, only 1.63% of respondents were aware about SAR and only 1.22% respondents knew the SAR value of their mobile phone they are using. The total respondents were 738.

viii-Office memorandum, Ministry of Communication & IT, 2012 notifies the revised SAR value 1.6 W/kg in India to comply with ICNIRP norms w.e.f 01 September, 2012. As per this notification- i) SAR value is to be displayed on handset. ii) all the mobile phones shall support handsfree operation. iii) mobile phones sold in India or imported from other country shall be checked for compliance of SAR limits. iv) handset manual shall contain handset safety precautions.

Methodology

The aim of the study is to check whether, SAR value of budget smart phones sold on online shopping sites is displayed?, and whether the information of SAR value is conveyed in a same way as other features of the phones are displayed? To achieve the goal, content analysis method is found suitable; therefore, this method is selected for the investigation. Secondary data have been used in the research and the data collected by the researchers marked in references. To achieve the objectives, researchers observed some news channels' programmes like cell guru (NDTV), Tech Guru (CNBC Awaz) and gadgets magazines like Tech Radar, Stuff, T3 etc. to know about budget smart phones. Thereafter, the range of budget is derived as Rs. 10K to 20K to define budget Smartphone. Focusing on the study two online selling websites on ranking basis of top ten were chosen, the Flipkart and the Amazon are found top two online selling websites in India.^{1,2,3} Therefore, universe of the study is budget smart phones selling on online by Flipkart and Amazon.

Top ten mobile phones' information available on these websites were selected for the analysis. This is the sample size of study. The variables of the study i.e. the features/specifications of smart phones were registered in a tabular form for further analysis. Units of analysis are camera(MP)rear, front; processor; battery(mAh); connectivity; price;

¹ (abroad, 2019)

² (brands, 2018)

³ (Foundation, 2019)

SAR value;(W/kg); sensor; weight; simslot; screen display and others. To get the sample, firstly, mobile section was clicked from the menu on both the websites, secondly Rs. 10,000 to 20,000 are selected in price range option to get the budget phones only, thereafter new and popular filter were applied from filter section of the websites. A large number of phones have been appeared on the screen. Subsequently, it was started from the first page which shows 24 items on the screen of both the websites. The selection has been started from the first page and only the mobile phones having more than 4 stars are chosen to have the more buyer centric data. Many mobile phones are listed with same model number, which are repeated on the basis of colour and RAM, thus, the repeated mobiles of same model numbers have been left out; subsequently, the gathered data have been presented in a Tabular form to perform the data analysis. Percentages method has been used to analyze the data.

Tabulation

On the basis of methodology, the following ten mobile phones have been selected and categorized in a Table. The main features which are displayed by the Flipkart and the Amazon to sell the product have been chosen for categorization, these are price, memory, camera, display, battery, processor, connectivity, other features and SAR value.

Table

Sr	Model name of the mobile	Webs ite (Flip kart & Amazon)	Camera(MP)Rear, Front	Display (Inch)	Memory (Ram, Rom)	Processor	Battery (mAh)	Connectivity	Price Rs.	Others	SAR value (W/kg)
1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Samsung Galaxy M30s	Both	R 48+8+5 F 16	6.4 Super amoled	4,64 gb	Exynos 9611, octa core	6000	4G LTE	13999	Os, sensor, weight etc	NO
2	Redmi Note 8 Pro	Both	R 64 F 20	6.53 inc HD	6, 128 gb	Media Tek G90 T	4500	4G LTE	15999	Os, sensors etc	NO
3	Vivo U20	Both	R 16 F 8	6.53 inc IPC LCD	4,64 gb	Qual com Snapdragon 675 AIE	5000	4G LTE	10990	Os, sensor, weight,simslot,etc	NO
4	Xiaomi Mi A3	Amazon	R 48AI F 32 AI	6.09 inc	4,64	Qual com	4030	4G LTE	12499	Os, sensor,	H 0.527 B 0.722

				Amoled		m Snapdragon 665				weight,simslot,etc	(in questions from manufacturer, not on display)
5	OPPO A9 2020	Both	R 48+8+2+2 F16	6.5 TFT LCD	8,128	Qualcomm SM6125 octa core	5000	4G LTE	18490	Os, sensor, weight,simslot,etc	NO
6	Nokia 7.2	Flipkart	R48+5+8 F20	6.3 HD+	4,64	Qualcomm Snapdragon 660 octa core	3500	4GVoLTE	16599	Os,sensor,weight,simslot,etc	1.190
7	Vivo S1	Both	R16+8+2 F32	6.38 sAmoled	6,64	Helio P65 (MT6768) Octa core	4500	4GVoLTE	F-17290 A-17990	Os, sensor, weight,simslot,etc	Head - 0.756 Body - 0.335 on Flipkart
8	OPPO F11	Both	R48+5 F16	6.5 TFT LTPS	6,128	MTK MT6771 V (P70) octa core	4020	4GVoLTE	16990	Os, sensor, weight,simslot,etc	NO
9	Samsung Galaxy A30s	Flipkart	R25+5+8 F16	6.4 sAmoled	4,64	Exynos 7904	4000	4GVoLTE	15999	Os, sensor, weight,simslot,etc	NO
10	Honor 20i	Amazon	R28+8+2 F32	6.2 IPS LCD	4,128	Kirin 710F	3400	4GVoLTE	10990	Os, sensor, weight,simslot,etc	NO

(Data retrieved on 2nd December 2019)

Analysis and interpretation

While going through the simple analysis process of table -1, it is found that all the specifications even some more technical information are being displayed by flipkart and amazon. To allure the buyers these information are presented in many ways like push information pattern, comparative chart, best seller tags, user ratings, discounts etc. price and memory (ram & rom) are found most focused information used by both the websites. The features mentioned in table-1 from A to J get more priority to be displayed while K which refers to SAR value is the neglected one. Out of ten handsets the SAR value of only 2 handsets i.e. serial number 6 & 7 are presented on the websites. It is also noticed that out of two websites Flipkart and Amazon the SAR information is shown only on flipkart, for serial number 4 SAR information is available on amazon but not as display it was available in FAQs hence, it is not considered as displayed information as per the adopted methodology.

Result: The data analysis clearly shows that the SAR information is found for 2 smart phones out of 10. The result is derived that 80% online selling websites do not show the SAR value of budget smart phones.

Conclusion and discussion

WHO, FCC and many more organizations are taking concern of public exposure to radio frequency emitted by mobile phones and its base stations. Subsequently, this exposure is measured in SAR (specific absorption rate) and the limit of emission is fixed to 1.6 w/kg and 2.0 w/kg in US and Europe separately. Studies show the adverse relation between mobile RF exposure and human health. Capping the SAR limit also reveals that higher the RF exposure the higher the health risk. India has also adopted the SAR limit of 1.6 w/kg and by notification of Ministry of Communication and & IT, it is made mandatory to display SAR value on handset and to contain safety precautions in the manual. Government of Belgium also made it mandatory to display SAR value at POS (point of sale)⁴.

India is one of the largest in terms of mobile users whereas budget segment has large share in the market and lack of proper information will lead to unawareness about this issue. This study shows that online shopping sites put more focus on mobile features like price, camera, display screen, battery, memory etc. to persuade the prospective buyers and the information about SAR value is highly neglected. As per the sample size only 20% information about SAR is available at POS. In other words, out of the 10 products only 2 display the SAR value.

Further, it was also found that only indicative information regarding SAR was presented. It lacks information note like “safety rating” the term is used with cars after NCAP testing.

⁴ (Service, 2019)

Furthermore, it was also found that the information of the SAR was not highlighted with the brand names and their features.

In addendum an empirical research on buyers' awareness about health issues by RF exposure and dissemination of research results to the public is advocated by the researchers of the study. The empirical study will throw broad light on the issue specifically on the buyers cognitive and awareness pattern. As Indian buyers are less aware of SAR limit and health risk⁵, displaying only SAR will not convey the whole message.

Further, it is also proposed that such cost effective devices should be developed to measure the amount RF exposure in a certain environment and also provide the safe limit option like device of measuring air quality index. The forthcoming 5G service for mobile phones will have higher frequency range which will not only affect the humans but other creatures like birds too, this issue has been raised in 2.0 a Hindi film. Therefore, it is also proposed to have a safety rating for mobiles just like NCAP rating for vehicles.

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POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTRA-GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION OF REGULATORS IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Independence and Accountability are two essential ideals for good governance, but surprisingly both these principles appear contradictory and prima facie seem irreconcilable.⁶ Nevertheless the success of any democratic legal system largely depends on the efficiency with which it addresses the conflict between these two ideals. The importance of balancing the aforementioned principles arises much more in case of those entities that though have been delegated the political power but are not democratically accountable in traditional sense to its citizens. These are the non-elected institutions called the independent regulatory agencies. The regulators communicate their means of maintaining good governance to the legislators in various ways. Such communication may or may not have the desired effect.

Governments across the globe have devised mechanisms to ensure this balance by incorporating enough checks and balances in their regulatory governance framework.⁷ The purpose is to ensure that the regulators act in a responsible and transparent manner thereby sustaining larger public confidence. Hence, an ideal regulatory system should define parameters governing accountability of regulators and its assessment.⁸

This article explores the concept of accountability in regulatory governance in India. For this purpose it assesses Indian regulatory framework on ground of political accountability. It further analyses the recommendations of various committees and commissions for reforming the same.

Independent Regulators and its Evolution in India

Regulators are the agencies responsible for achieving the social, economic and environmental objectives of a state in a specialized and focused manner.⁹ They act as a public authority or an agency of the government responsible for regulating and supervising markets, sectors, human

⁶UNCTAD Secretariat, Note on Independence and Accountability of Competition Authorities (2009) https://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/CCPB_IGE2014_UNCTADNOTE_EMCF_en.pdf

⁷OECD, OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook 2018, OECD Publishing, Paris (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264303072-en>

⁸ OECD, The Governance of Regulators, OECD Best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy, OECD Publishing, (2012) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264209015-en>

⁹ OECD/Korea Development Institute, Improving Regulatory Governance: Trends, Practices and the Way Forward, OECD Publishing, Paris (2017) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264280366-en>.

activity, profession etc. by enforcing safety standards, protecting consumer interest, price & quality control etc. A regulator exists in various forms and across different levels of the government. It can be in the form of a separate division within a ministry, a separate entity with its own statutory foundation (independent regulators) or it can even be an independent international agency subject to an international standard setting entities or supranational bodies. For example, the Forward Markets Commission (FMC) which has merged with Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in 2015 was a department of the Ministry of Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, whereas SEBI on the other side is an independent regulator deriving its power from the SEBI Act.¹⁰ Similarly, the European Central Bank (ECB) is a great example of an independent international agency subject to a supranational body i.e., European Union.

This concept of regulation by independent agencies evolved in the United States of America. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) emerged as the first independent Commission in the United States of America through repositioning outside the Department of the Interior in 1889.¹¹ A similar structure was later adopted in other areas of regulation in the country. The reformers believed that this would help to deal with the complexities of the market, reduce political intervention in decision making, thus safeguarding national and public interest. This structure of market regulation through independent agencies also helped to create a level playing field for both government and private entities in the market across various sectors.¹²

In the context of India, the introduction of economic reforms in 1991 led to the establishment of independent regulatory bodies across various sectors. Prior to 1991, the Indian markets were regulated through government departments and ministries with very few regulatory bodies such as the RBI, which was established in 1934¹³, and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), a non-statutory body in 1988 which was given statutory power in 1992¹⁴. The reforms paved a way for establishment of independent regulatory bodies in different sectors exercising legislative, executive and judicial functions which includes Telecom Regulatory

¹⁰ Harsimran Kalra & Sakshi Balani, Parliamentary Oversight of Regulator: Background Note for the Conference on Effective Legislatures, PRS Legislative Research (2012), <https://www.prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/discussion-papers/parliamentary-oversight-regulators>

¹¹ Dominique Custos, The Rulemaking Power of Independent Regulatory Agencies, *The American Journal of Comparative Law* (September 2006), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265400028_The_Rulemaking_Power_of_Independent_Regulatory_Agencies

¹² Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 13th Report, Organizational Structure of Government of India, (2009)

¹³ Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934

¹⁴ Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992

Authority of India (TRAI), Central and State Electricity Regulatory Commissions, Competition Commission of India (CCI) etc.

Accountability in Regulatory Framework

The Regulatory bodies hold a greater burden of fairness, accountability and transparency when compared to government departments because unlike government agencies they are not elected by people even though their decisions and regulation are binding them.¹⁵

The two major components for an effective regulatory framework are the independence and accountability of the regulators. “**Independence**” guarantees protection against undue influence and ensures stakeholders' interest are conferred due importance in the formulation and implementation of regulation. “**Accountability**” on the other side warrants effective and efficient regulations based on careful examination. It protects the stakeholders against arbitrary decisions and also provides for a redressal mechanism in form of appellate authorities and judicial bodies against inappropriate regulatory decisions. A government needs to find a balanced approach between the above principles as a higher level independence tends to call for a greater accountability.

The three major stakeholders to which a regulator holds accountability includes:

- i the legislature,**
- ii the regulated entities/ subjects and**
- iii the general public**

On the basis of these stakeholders accountability of the regulators can be further classified as political and legal accountability. ‘**Political accountability**’ implies supervision by the concerned ministry or legislature of the working of the regulator. The reason for ensuring political accountability lies in the fact that it is the government which is democratically responsible for the functioning of the regulatory framework and not for the regulator. Therefore it needs to ensure that the regulator function in line to its objectives through various mechanisms including annual reporting, performance evaluation etc. ‘**Legal accountability**’ on the other hand provides the aggrieved regulated entities or the general public to challenge the regulatory decision or appeal against its orders. It ensures that the

¹⁵ Som, L. and F. Naru, Regulatory policy in India: Moving towards regulatory governance, OECD Regulatory Policy Working Papers, No. 8, OECD Publishing, Paris, (2017)

regulatory decisions are within the powers of the regulator and due compliance of administrative procedures in making the regulations.

Political Accountability of Regulators in India

The existence of a regulator is derived from the act passed by the legislature and it operates within the ambit of powers conferred to it under the act. A regulator subsists to fulfill the objectives defined by the legislature and is believed to protect the interest of the public. Therefore a regulatory agency is required to be accountable to the legislature, either directly or through concerned minister, and should report regularly and publicly to the legislature establishing them, on its objectives and the discharge of its functions, and demonstrate that it is efficiently and effectively discharging its responsibilities with integrity, honesty and objectivity.”¹⁶

Communication channels between Legislators and Regulators:

In the current Indian framework, regulators are held accountable to the legislature through the concerned ministries. The regulators also are required to submit their annual reports and/or audited accounts to the legislature at the end of the financial year. The regulatory actions could even be questioned in the parliament through various mechanisms such as:¹⁷

- i. **Question Hour:** During the question hour the member of the parliament can question the functioning of the regulators and the concerned minister has to answer the questions.
- ii. **Discussions:** Discussions can take place under various Rules of Procedure of the Parliament where the concerned minister can be questioned on various issues related to the regulator.
- iii. **Department related Standing Committees:** These committees consist of the members of both houses of the parliament and they review the functioning of the regulators within their departments.
- iv. **Finance Committees:** The statues establishing the regulators require annual audit reports of the accounts of the regulators to be prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor

¹⁶OECD, The Governance of Regulators, OECD Best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy, OECD Publishing, (2012) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264209015-en>

¹⁷Harsimran Kalra & Sakshi Balani, Parliamentary Oversight of Regulator: Background Note for the Conference on Effective Legislatures, PRS Legislative Research(2012), <https://www.prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/discussion-papers/parliamentary-oversight-regulators>

General of India (CAG). These reports are presented before the Parliament and reviewed by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

- v. **Ad-hoc Committees:** When there is serious debate/crisis related to a regulator. Parliament may establish an ad-hoc committee to examine its functioning.

The political accountability of regulators has always been a question of debate in the country. The parliamentary oversight is often considered an ineffective mechanism to ensure accountability. It is always argued that the annual reports submitted by the regulators are not discussed with any seriousness. The regulatory actions are also examined only in cases of impending crisis or a serious debate in the country. The accountability of regulators through concerned ministry is also questioned as it is much easier for the powerful groups to pressurize the regulator through the ministry then through the parliament.

The Reserve Bank of India is the central bank of India regulating the currency and the banking system of the country. Unlike the apex banks in countries like USA and UK, there is no formal accountability mechanism is laid down by statutes for the Reserve Bank of India.¹⁸ The Reserve Bank remains accountable to Parliament only through the Finance Minister and is not regularly required to report periodically before the standing committee.¹⁹ There is also no accountability mechanism against the regulatory actions taken by the RBI as there is no appellate authority or a mechanism to even review the regulatory and supervisory decisions of the Reserve Bank of India.²⁰ Similar situation prevails with other independent regulators in the country, as these regulators are not questioned before the Parliament and it only the concerned minister, who cannot be held responsible to the acts of the independent regulators, questioned before the Standing Committees.

The OECD Regulatory Policy Working Paper on the Regulatory Policy of India concluded by stating that “Many regulators fall under the administrative control of their parent ministry, efforts to create independent regulators have been resisted. Regulators have in other cases actively internalized political sentiments in their decision-making. Regulatory capture by local politicians is common and as a consequence undue influence exists. Even within this limited operating space for regulatory bodies, they have provided an increased range of

¹⁸ Central Board of Directors, Governance, Human Resources Development and Organisational Management, Reserve Bank of India Annual Report 2011-12, (2012)

¹⁹ Harsimran Kalra & Sakshi Balani, Parliamentary Oversight of Regulator: Background Note for the Conference on Effective Legislatures, PRS Legislative Research, (2012)
<https://www.prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/discussion-papers/parliamentary-oversight-regulators>

²⁰ Gautam Chikarmane, RBI versus the government: Independence and accountability in a democracy, (2018) <https://www.orfonline.org/research/rbi-versus-the-government-independence-and-accountability-in-a-democracy-46085/>, (April 13, 2020)

accountability and participatory possibilities through the processes of the regulatory design.”²¹

The Committee for Reforming the Regulatory Environment for Doing Business in India²² established by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs also considered political accountability of regulators to be ineffective and stated that “in guise of administrative accountability, the functional autonomy of regulators tends to get impeded and sometimes the regulatory organisations resemble as subordinate offices of the Government Ministries and Departments”.

The government has taken various steps towards reforming the deficiencies in the regulatory framework. Different Commissions and Committees have been entrusted with the responsibility to develop frameworks and mechanisms for an independent and accountable system of regulators in the country. The Reports stating the observation and recommendations of the committees and Commissions have discussed in detail below:

- ***Second Administrative Reforms Commission’s 13th Report on Organizational Structure of Government of India***²³:

The President of India set up a Commission of Inquiry called the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) to prepare a detailed blueprint for revamping the public administration system. The Commission’s objective was to suggest measures to achieve a proactive, responsive, accountable, sustainable and efficient administration for the country at all levels of the government. The Commission in its 13th Report on the Organizational Structure of Government of India analyzed and made recommendations for reforming the structure of the Government of India to create a pro-active, efficient and flexible organizational framework.

The chapter 6 of the report deals with creating an effective regulatory framework in India. It explained the current framework and structure of the regulators in the country and made recommendations to improve the same. The Commission considered the appearance of the independent regulators before the departmentally related Standing Committees of the Parliament to be a more effective legislative oversight and was of opinion that such parliamentary oversight to be limited to major decisions. The Committee was of the view that

21 Som, L. and F. Naru, Regulatory policy in India: Moving towards regulatory governance, OECD Regulatory Policy Working Papers, No. 8, OECD Publishing, Paris, (2017) <https://doi.org/10.1787/b335b35d-en> (April 13, 2020)

22 Ministry of Corporate Affairs, GOI, Report of the Committee for Reforming the Regulatory Environment for Doing Business in India, (September, 2013)

23 Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 13th Report, Organizational Structure of Government of India, (2009)

having an exclusive Parliamentary Standing Committee for Regulators may not be feasible given the widely varying mandate and area of operations of the regulators. . However, the commission recommended that each statute creating a Regulator should include a provision for an impact assessment periodically by an external agency to reduce regulatory intervention.

- ***Draft Regulatory Reform Bill 20**²⁴***:

This draft bill prepared by the Planning Commission of India for consultation provided an institutional framework for regulatory commissions, defined their roles and functions, accountability towards the legislature and interface of regulators with the markets and the people. The proposed bill applicable to the infrastructure regulators aimed to supplement the existing sector specific laws. The provisions for political accountability are included under Section 16, Section 59 etc. of the said draft bill and are based on the recommendations of consultation paper of the Planning Commission of India titled “**Approach to Regulation of Infrastructure**”.²⁵

The consultation paper aimed to establish democratic accountability of regulators. It suggested that the regulations must be compulsorily subject to prior publication with sufficient time for notice and comment and with compulsory obligation on regulators to respond to the comments prior final approved regulation. It supports the parliamentary oversight of regulators by requiring regulators to submit an annual report stating the regulatory approach for the forthcoming year and outcomes expected in context of the legislation and the policy directives set by the ministry. The annual reports should be finalized after transparent consultation with stakeholders and submitted to parliament through the concerned ministry. These reports would then be scrutinized by appropriate legislative sub-committee and the regulator would be made answerable in writing to the questions either directly or through the concerned minister.

It also supported legal accountability in addition to political accountability as provided a mechanism to challenge the regulatory decisions through appellate authority and also provided for an appeal to the Supreme Court of India, but only on questions of law. However, the power of judicial review would be limited only to questions of law and decision making and not extend to policy choices made by regulatory institutions.

The above draft bill and consultation paper in light of accountability of the regulators failed to ensure the independence of the regulators. It provided for strict legislative control over the regulators which could hamper the basic objective of an independent regulator.

24Planning Commission, GOI, Draft Regulatory Reform Bill, 20**, (April, 2009)

25Planning Commission, GOI, Approach to Regulation of Infrastructure, (September, 2008)

- ***Report of the Committee for Reforming the Regulatory Environment for Doing Business in India***²⁶:

The Report was submitted by a Committee set up the Ministry of Corporate Affairs in 2012 for Reforming the Regulatory Environment for Doing Business in India in response to the World Bank's Doing Business Report, 2012 (DBR) which ranked India amongst the countries ranked at the bottom of various sub-indices. The Committee included representation from State Governments, Public Sector Enterprises and Regulatory Bodies.

It recommended that the regulatory bodies should undertake self-evaluation in every three year and put out conclusions in public domain for discussions and debate. It believed that this process would also help in regaining public confidence in the regulators. The committee further recommended for setting up internal regulatory review authority in each organization empowered to write rules and regulations. The committee was of an opinion that an organisation writing regulations including regulatory authority, ministry or department of the Central or State Government would have a better understanding of the context in which the regulations are written and can contextually assess the continuing relevance of these regulations. The internal review authority would examine, in consultation with all stakeholders, whether an existing rule or regulation has outlived its utility. It would also review draft regulations to ensure no unnecessary regulations come into force. The Regulatory Review Authority would also be responsible for the regulatory impact assessment (RIA), which should be a condition precedent to the writing of regulations and would be done before the public consultation process of regulation.

The Committee therefore suggested towards a regulatory framework with limited political intervention in the functioning of the regulators and at the same time ensured accountability through other measures. It focused on improving the transparency in regulatory framework which is an important component of accountability.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The present regulatory framework in India makes it challenging to ensure the independence and accountability of the regulators in the country. The functioning of the regulators is completely left to the ministry concerned as the regulatory actions are rarely discussed before the parliament. This process makes it easier for the influential to guide the regulatory policies and decisions. This has led people to lose their confidence in the independent regulatory

²⁶Ministry of Corporate Affairs, GOI, [Report of the Committee for Reforming the Regulatory Environment for Doing Business in India](#),(September, 2013)

agencies in the country. The recommendations made by various committees and commissions to improve the present framework have not been implemented by the government. There is dire need to revise the present regulatory framework and also develop mechanisms to evaluate the performance of the independent regulators.

International Organisations (such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)) have developed best practice principles for regulatory policy and governance. Such principles could be implemented to develop an effective, independent, transparent and accountable regulatory framework for India. Mechanisms could be developed to evaluate the performance of the regulators on pre-designed parameters based on international experiences. Considering the important role of the regulators in the economy, an independent department or commission could also be established to reform and evaluate the regulatory framework.

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DRAMATURGY AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA: DECODING THE VIRTUAL SELF

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Abstract

Social Media has entered our lives to an extent where it seems impossible to live without our smart phones. The virtual lives of the users though are just a fractional part of their real lives. People sometimes even fake it to construct a different virtual identity for themselves. In contemporary times the social media behaviour can be studied in terms of Goffman's theory of dramaturgy. This paper looks at the sharing of real socio economic status patterns of 500 respondents on social media along with their dependence on social media for real life decision making.. The study follows a mixed method approach where a survey along with expert interviews is conducted. Results indicate that people subconsciously use dramaturgy while sharing the real life socio economic status online and seek approval of social media peer to an extent to make real life decisions.

Key words: Social media, Dramaturgy, Virtual identity Socio economic status.

Introduction

Human beings have been communicating since their existence. This travel has been a long journey. They communicate for various reasons and they communicate with an agenda. The current times have seen the emergence of the phenomenon of Social media. Social media has entered our lives in a very impactful way. “Contemporary times have seen social media becoming “ubiquitous” and essential for maintaining social network and sharing content” Asur, S., & Huberman, B. A. (2010)¹. Since the advent of social media and social networking problems people tend to spend a lot of time in their virtual worlds. Social media or social networking sites can be prominently located in the debates happening today. Today, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have been intertwined in the digital makeup of common households groups and organizations all over the world. Boyd, D. (2015)²

The emergence of social media has given the users an opportunity to lead a parallel life. This parallel life is their virtual self. The virtual setup is a “vehicle” to observe, imitate and model “avatars” as in virtual selves lead to fuelling these processes. Yoon, G., & Vargas, P. T. (2014).³ In the context of “dramaturgy” Goffman, E. (1978)⁴ mentioned that these avatars plan and execute a certain role play that they have designed. The Social media is the stage set for the virtual identities of the users. The back stages are their lives and their walls (like on Facebook) are their front stages. Social networking sites are transform how the youth engage

with others users in their social worlds. Salimkhan, G., Manago, A. M., & Greenfield, P. M. (2010)⁵

Today's age is that of Social media. Everywhere we come across people who constantly engage on these social media platforms. The inventions of computers and later smart phones have changed the way we communicate forever. Social media today is much more than just a trend. It's turned into an indispensable part of the fabric of contemporary society. It's difficult to estimate how social media has impacted our world. It is true on multiple levels, including how we socialize, how we gain access to information how we entertain ourselves and also how we conduct business.

The Social Media Advent

Contrary to prior predictions that moving social interactions from face-to-face to text based media would lead to an "impoverished communication environment", this new media has now adapted the use of social web services as a vital means of interacting, communicating and sharing, thus enhancing human connectivity and sociability Hart et al (2008)⁶ It's a matter of interest to look into the history of social media. It firstly began with Bulletin Board Systems, which was later followed by services like America Online and Compuserv. These provided people who were not mandatorily techies with a way to connect with each other. America Online better known as AOL became the first major social networking site. AOL can be termed as a precursor to MySpace and, later, Facebook in many a ways. After being launched in 2004, Facebook and Twitter reached users all around world by 2006. These have been among the most popular social media sites on the Internet. After this various other sites including Spotify, Tumblr and Pintrest also popped up filling up social networking niches sites Whatsapp messenger a messaging and Voiceover platform also came up in 2009 which allowed users to make voice and video calls, setup display pictures, put status and share all kinds of locations, documents and pictures. Instagram a social networking site which allows users to share photos and videos was also launched in 2010. Both Whatsapp and Instagram are now owned by Facebook. The common feature of all these platforms was to make internet accessible to users every day. They also provided the users with friendly interfaces features like instant messaging creating profiles and creating groups etc. The internet minus these social media sites was just a huge digital wilderness where there was no locating your known and no resource sharing. The launch of these websites was just the tip of the iceberg in relation to the impact they caused. People were highly impacted when they engaged with these platforms. They created a parallel selves for themselves- their virtual selves.

Virtual Self

The construction for an identity for the virtual word is termed as virtual self. The users of social media require constructing these identities which may or may not match with their real

selves. The virtual world has become so engrossing that people spend a lot of time on these platforms. This is changing the way people used to communicate. The identity construct of these avatars as they are called is a matter to probe as they are rapidly changing the social equations of the globe. The craving to show your best character on social media channels stems from a variety of psychological factors. Virtual mediums allow people to experiment with themselves. They enjoy the freedom to alter their identities to their wishes. This engagement with one's own self through the virtual environment and the constant negotiation between the real and virtual world forms the core of this study.

Changed Socialization

Social Media has changed the way how people connect and socialize. "Online access provides drastically superior opportunities than previous communication technologies, leading to the fact that modern-day communication environments are defined as new media." Gunduz .U. (2017)⁷ Contents that are produced by people and sharing of these contents, quick spreading and acceptance of social media have been able to provide a social dimension to contemporary communication channels. These platforms of social communication are online channels of communication. Owing to the fact that social communication sites enable users to share their own content as well as content created by professional for specific purposes users tend to create a digital profile of their selves. Social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace, Google Plus and Periscope, have become extremely popular . The common aspects of these social networks are that posts are produced by users and are shared with people who are in the same platform." Gunduz .U. (2017)⁸

The first major change is you can connect to people from your past. Facebook made it easy for you to reconnect with lost contacts from the past. These were friend, co workers old classmates and so on. People were excited about this new phenomenon. They could feel nostalgic and an emotional cord was touched by this social networking site. Thus it gained immense popularity. Also it ensured that you could control your privacy.

The second change that these sites brought was making the world a global village. The physical distances seem to have vanished. People can make video call to their loved ones using Whatsapp. They can share thoughts message photos and videos thus diminishing the physical distances amongst them. One thus doesn't have to physically travel to share the events happening in their daily lives that their loved ones would like to know about them to the extent that now a days even invitations have started to be extended on social media platforms rather than the traditional ways.

Thirdly one can see that the access to smart phones has made it easy for people to be on social media. With the growing facility of internet and cheap data availability people can easily connect to social media network in the convenience of their preferred time and

location. Mobile phones are generally carried everywhere hence providing an opportunity to socialize everywhere. These constant interactions for sure impact the overall identity of a person. The self that they portray on social media is the virtual self.

Social media and Dramaturgy

The study revolves around the theory of dramaturgy proposed by Erving Goffman in his 1959 book titled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Though the idea has come a long way and has faced criticism it holds true even today. It is applicable equally well to the current day interaction between individuals in social media. Sannicolas, N. (1997)⁹ states that the emergence of technology and communication that is computer mediated one can very well observe that that dramaturgy is displayed every single day within the online networks of chatting. He further states that a lot of work has been done on this stage called internet chat and the same has attracted a lot of audience and performers in this case the users of social media. Goffman proposed that our life is like a play which is never ending and people around are actors. He assumed that when a person is born he is thrust in to his everyday life which is like a stage. Since our birth we become a part of the process of socialization. We start learning to play our roles in life from other people. We began enacting our roles with others whereas they start enacting their roles with us. Goffman proposed that whatever we do we are playing some kind of a role on the stage called life. He further distinguished front and back stages in the concept. Examples of the front stages can be a wedding, a lecture, a dinner table, or in this study, social media interaction. Hence any place where we present ourselves is a front stage. Looking at the importance of our social media in our lives we can also derive the importance of the performance we make on this platform as a front stage. Further sometimes we retreat to back stages of life. These are private areas where we don't need to act. We also use this opportunity to practice and prepare for returning to front stages. While using the stage of social media as a front stage we portray our virtual selves in a specific manner. "We portray ourselves in a manner we want people to perceive us. Miller, H. (1995)¹⁰ observed that one of the things people are supposed to do while communicating with other individuals is to present themselves in such a way that they are acceptable to other people such that they look entitled to certain considerations look to be having certain expertise, look to be morally upright and so on. We choose our pictures, places we visit, our opinions in the back stage and then share them in the front stages. Goffman, E. (1964)¹¹ says that 'Backstage' preparation is helpful to people for presenting a 'front' that is effective. 'expressive resources' can be channelised, and collaboration can be looked for from others who are a part of the interaction." Similarly we prepare ourselves in backstage of real lives to present our perceived virtual realities in the front stage of our social media profiles. Miller, H. (1995)¹². stated that Electronic communication (EC) has started a new array of frames to facilitate communication with an emergent decorum. We select pictures that we want to share and formulate our opinions in a manner we want people to perceive us. We want others to

have a specific impression about us Goffman looks at this aspect as Impression management. In context of Social Media the same holds true .Virtual Identities are all about image management The way social media is affecting our lives and behaviour, it becomes important to look at the kind of transformation it is making the psychology as well as behaviour of a person. The unpredictable behaviour in terms of hiding the real socio economic status and being dependent on social media on social media for real life decision making is not very much researched upon in India. The research gap of this study lies in the fact that a quantitative as well as qualitative approach needs to be studied in coherence to bring out a reliable result. The study looks at the question of if users on social media hide their socio economic status to gain a certain virtual identity that they want for themselves in the minds of their peer along with if the overuse of social media has made the users dependent on social media for taking real life decisions, small or big.

Research Questions

RQ1 Do social media users hide their real socio economic status?

RQ 2 Are social media users dependent on social media for taking real life decisions?

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method .The universe of the study social media platform and the population is social media users. The sample size has been derived from the formula. The quantitative part of the study was to conducted an online survey. A google form was floated on various social media platforms. Convenient purposive sampling method was adopted to get the forms filled.

$$Ss= \frac{Z^2 * (p) * (1-p)}{c^2}$$

c^2

Where: Z = Z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = percentage picking a choice, expressed as decimal
(.5 used for sample size needed)

c = confidence interval, expressed as decimal
(e.g., .04 = ±4)

The sample size hence is 385. To reduce the error factor 500 responses will be collected.

The qualitative part of the study conducted expert interviews with four experts from the fields of communication, psychology and sociology.

Data collected by both the methods was studied and analysed in the light of the theory of dramaturgy

Data Analysis

The questions that was inquired looked at whether respondents have ever hid their real name age and financial status on social media along with wheather respondents considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc)

Frequency/ Opinion	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	No Response
Opinion on whether respondents have ever hid their real name age and financial status on social media	174	108	138	36	30	14
Opinion on whether considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc)	150	124	138	46	25	7

Table 1

Table 1 shows wheather respondents ever hid their real name,age and financial status online. 174 respondents said they never did so whereas 108 said they rarely did so . 138 respondents said they sometimes hid some information online whereas 36 respondnts said they often did so. 30 respondents said they always did so whereas 14 chose not to respond to the question. The table further shows wheather respondents considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc) 150 respondents said they never did so whereas 124 said they rarely did so . 138 respondents said they sometimes considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc) whereas 46 respondnts said they often did so. 25 respondents said they always did so whereas 7 chose not to respond to the question.

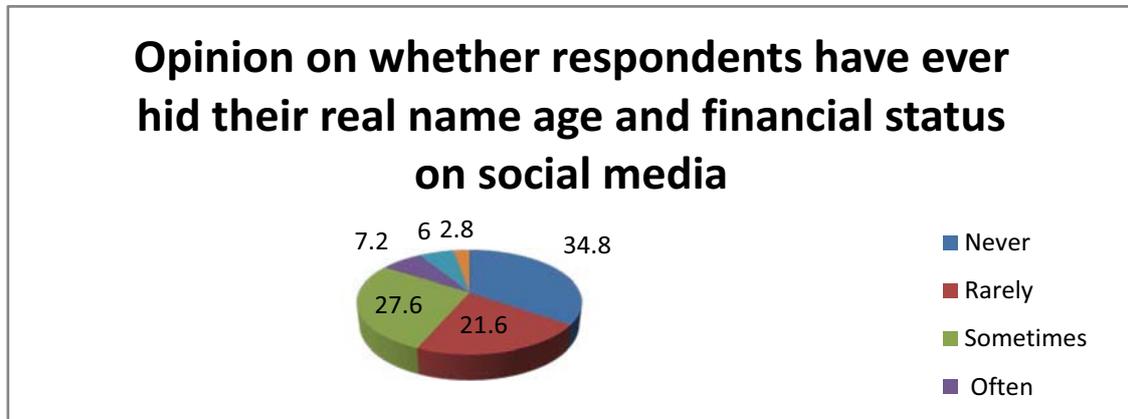


Figure 01

Figure 01 shows whether respondents ever hid their real name, age and financial status online. 34.8% respondents said they never did so whereas 21.6% said they rarely did so . 27.6% respondents said they sometimes hid some information online whereas 7.2% respondents said they often did so. 6% respondents said they always did so whereas 2.8% chose not to respond to the question.

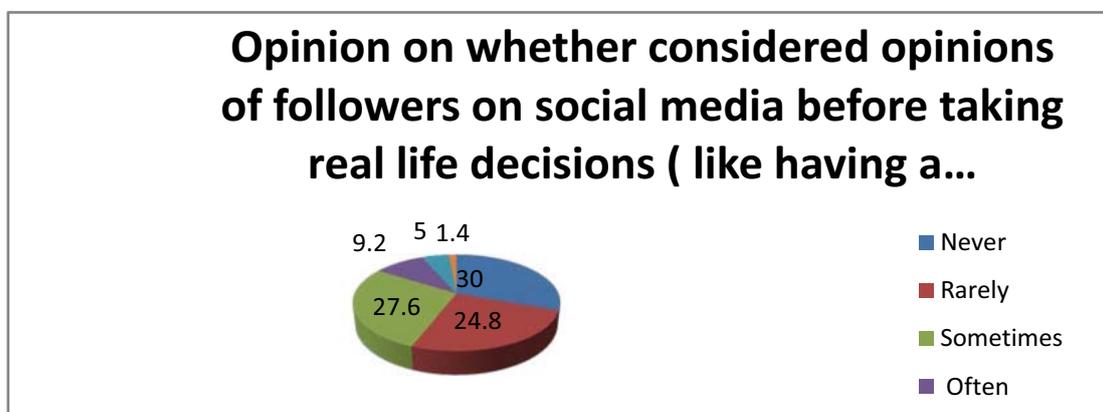


Figure 02

Figure 02 shows whether respondents considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc) 30 % respondents said they never did so whereas 24.8% said they rarely did so . 27.6% respondents said they sometimes considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc) whereas 9.2% respondents

said they often did so. 5% respondents said they always did so whereas 1.4% chose not to respond to the question.

Interpretation

The results brought to light the dramturgy between real and virtual lives clearly Respondents were asked wheather respondents ever hid their real name,age and financial status online. 174 respondents said they never did so whereas 108 said they rarely did so . 138 respondents said they sometimes hid some information online whereas 36 respondnts said they often did so 30 respondents said they always did so .. 138 respondents said they sometimes considered opinions of followers on social media before taking real life decisions (like having a haircut, buying a car etc) whereas 46 respondnts said they often did so.

The users plan in their real lives to what projection they want to make online about themselves. So in real lives they selected those aspects and share selective or some times fake informations about themselves. They may hide the real personal informations and project themselves in a different way . The aims of doing so may be diverse inculding gaining accepantnce from peer, trying to gain prasiie and popularity and so on. What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007) They are also dependent on social media to take real life decisions. They share opinion polls and seek approval of their peer when they want to take certain decisions in real life.

As put by Dr Monika

In real and virtual lives conflicting identities do exist. One can count so many examples that people beleive in certain things but dont want to acknowledge it in the virtual lives and on the social networkingg platforms. They are very careful about their virtual images and dont want the images they have made for the,mselves to braek. They are very careful about being associated with a roup or person. They do so to maintain a neutral social stance and dont want to get themselves branded. Thus they maintain double standards in real and virtual lives. They have diffrent opinions online and offline. The social status that they maintain online may not necessarily match their real selves. They may follow certain things in real lives and may not at all do that in their real lives. They constantly look for approval from their social media peer.

Dr S. Mishra opined that

It is a matter of interest how young people find it fascinating to pose in front of an SUV or luxury car that may belong to someone else. They do fake checkins. Like they are travelling to a foreign destination or check in to high end hotels . They tend to exhibit themselves on theri

virtual platforms They show off which is normal for their age and try to gain acceptance for their behaviour.

Further Dr. Monika commented that

We in normal are not known to our social media friends in person. We don't know them face to face. We don't interact with them on a daily basis so it is easier to fake about one self online. It is easy to plan the drama in the backstage and enact it on front stages .In contemporary times people use social media to showcase how nice they are in real life and how good are their social relations. Thus we engage in double standards very often when it comes to their virtual avatars. They but also want peoples acknowledgement for their online behaviour and apply them in real life decision making.

Dr. R K. Khayalia pointed out that

Social media has given rise to insecurity among the users. Those who have feel insecure of having things and thus fake on social media and those who don't fake it to show that they have it. Users try to nullify their insecurities in their virtual spaces. Whatever positive or negative assets one has are actually threat on social media. So people want to be accepted by others on social media. They are very influenced by what others thought of them.

Dr S. Rai mentioned that

The basic reason for hiding a real socio economic status by a person online is that they have different aspirations as per their social environment. There are people who live with meagre means in their lives. Their obvious dream and aspiration is to be well off. That he has enough money not only for himself but also to buy luxury for himself. Social media provides him with this opportunity. He can create his own role play and enact his part for others on social media. He can also sometimes base his real life decision on these social media experiences

Dr Monika further opined that

People belonging to lower income groups tend do hide their real financial or social status more. If you have something in real lives you will probably not showcase it. The charm of owing it is gone for you. Yet one may showcase what he believes is lacking in his life. The may provide him with momentary satisfaction. Those belonging to higher income groups probably show off to gain popularity like celebrities..They have a higher status socially and economically and they need publicity for every small or big act of theirs. They also want to maintain their fan following and if they don't give information about their acts fan following can reduce.

Dr S. Mishra also pointed out that

There is a less of gate keeping on social media. The socio economic status of a class may differ. So at times is very disapproving. To cope up with this inequality they may show off. The Rich express and poor off exhibit. There is a difference. Young people do it more often.

Dr R K Khayalia opined that

Users don't share their real social and economic status. There is an insecurity that they want to cope with. Both rich and poor have their own set of insecurities that they deal with in real lives. There is an insecurity of have and have not.

Finally Dr.S.Rai summed up as

A person who is well to do have an identity crisis to prove to others how they are better than the others. And that they are living up to the expectation of the society they are a part of. So they would like to portray that look how much charity and good we are doing to the society. The idea is that the society has set certain parameters and points of references to be followed for us. We define satisfaction but society defines success for us . So this lower income group person wants to be called successful. Rich people may be shunned because of being rich so they use charity to meet the targets of reference of the society. So this clearly is associated with real life decision making too.

Conclusion

The results indicate that people lead different lives online and offline. The similarity between the lives is very less. People hide their social status including their relationships and their economic status including their financial health. They actually on the back stages of their lives plan their virtual identities for themselves. They tend to create a euphoric world for themselves where the live their dream lives. The study found that virtual lives of people fall under the umbrella of Goffman's theory of dramaturgy. They use their real lives as back stages and virtual lives as front stages and enact a different self for themselves that they want others to believe about themselves. They gain satisfaction in creating these virtual avatars for themselves along with seeking approval from others for taking real life decisions. Thus social media has been crucial in creating an identity of users that they actually look for in real lives.

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