

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT



1

Ms. Vedhavarshini. T. & Dr Neelamalar. M: News coverage on 'Artivism' and Protest Art in the Hijab Protests of Iran and Karnataka

9

Ms. Mayuree Pal & Dr C.P. Rashmi: The Rise of Fact-Checking and its Importance in the Modern Workplace

18

Nadim Akhter: Online News Aggregators: A Study of the News Consumption Behaviour of the Users

31

Dr Sweta Suman: Gender Portrayals in Indian TV Advertisements: Understanding the Perception of Youth in Rohtak

39

Dr Ramesh Kumar Sharma & Dr Namit Vikram Singh: Can Smart Education Address Knowledge Gap in India? An Opinion



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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

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements and socio-political upheavals, the role of media in shaping public discourse and influencing societal norms has become increasingly prominent. The latest edition of International Journal of Communication Development (IJCD) research journal delves into various facets of media and its intersection with society, presenting a diverse array of studies and insights.

The first paper examines the phenomenon of 'Artivism' and Protest Art in the context of the Hijab Protests in Iran and Karnataka. In an age where activism takes various forms, from street protests to online campaigns, understanding the role of art in social movements becomes imperative. This paper sheds light on how artistic expressions can serve as powerful tools for dissent and social change.

Moving on, the rise of misinformation and fake news has underscored the importance of fact-checking in the modern workplace. The second paper elucidates the significance of fact-checking in navigating the information landscape, particularly in an era where misinformation can spread like wildfire. It highlights the crucial role of fact-checkers in upholding truth and accuracy in journalism and beyond.

The third paper explores the evolving landscape of online news aggregators and their impact on news consumption behavior. With the proliferation of digital platforms, understanding how users interact with news content becomes essential for media organizations and policymakers alike. This study offers valuable insights into the changing dynamics of news consumption in the digital age.

Shifting focus to gender portrayals in media, the fourth paper delves into the depiction of gender in Indian TV advertisements, specifically targeting youth in Rohtak. Media representations play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes. This study delves into the nuances of gender portrayals in advertising and its implications for social attitudes and behaviors.

Lastly, in an era of digital innovation, the fifth paper examines the potential of smart education in addressing knowledge gaps in India. With disparities in access to quality education persisting across the country, leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes becomes imperative. This paper offers valuable insights into the transformative potential of smart education initiatives in bridging the knowledge divide.

Collectively, the papers featured in this edition of research journal (IJCD) offer a comprehensive exploration of the complex interplay between media and society. From art as a tool of activism to the transformative potential of smart education, these studies underscore the multifaceted role of media in shaping our perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. We hope that the insights presented herein will stimulate further research and dialogue in this ever-evolving field.

Dr Durgesh Tripathi  
Editor, IJCD



## NEWS COVERAGE ON 'ARTIVISM' AND PROTEST ART IN THE HIJAB PROTESTS OF IRAN AND KARNATAKA

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### Abstract

*Performing arts have been popular during different periods of conflict throughout history, and have often played an important role to the communities during difficult times. Artivism (aka art activism) and protest arts have become increasingly prominent forms of protest in recent times, as they provide a powerful platform for artists to address issues and mobilize support. In early 2022, a group of Muslim women in India were asked to remove their hijabs for identification purposes during a school examination, which eventually led to the Karnataka State restricting hijabs in educational institutions. The incident sparked outrage among the Muslim community and led to a wider debate about religious freedom and discrimination in India. Months later, the women of Iran engaged in anti-hijab protests moral policing and the custodial death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini for not wearing hijab properly. Art has played a crucial role in hijab protests, serving as a platform for women to express their experiences and challenge their restrictions. Social media has also played a significant role with activists using them to connect with wider audiences. The form, medium and impact of artivism or protest art in these women-led protests is elucidated in this study by analyzing the news coverage on arts and artists in hijab row.*

**Keywords:** protest art, artivism, online activism, hijab row, performing arts, visual arts

### Background

The Hijab, burka, and niqab, are the traditional headscarves of Muslim women that have become a symbol of religious and cultural identity. Hijab has been mandatory for Iranian women who are legally obliged to wear loose long clothes and cover their hair in public, including participation in sports. Mandatory hijab was passed into law five years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, when Gasht-e Ershad, or the moral police was established to spread the culture of modesty. Their powers include the ability to mandate female head covering and arrest individuals who violate the moral codes of Islam. 22-year-old Mahsa Amini was arrested for breaching the Islamic dress code by wearing her hijab improperly. The officials claimed that she had suffered a cardiac arrest at the Moral Policing Centre. She died three days later at a hospital which ignited protests in Iran's capital Tehran, where the protestors gained support from all over the world.

In Karnataka, the protests however were against the attempts to ban hijab-wearing in educational institutions in their State. A group of Muslim students was asked to remove their hijabs for identification purposes during a school examination. Similar incidents sparked



outrage among the Muslim community and led to a wider debate about religious freedom and discrimination. It is to be noted that till then wearing a hijab was neither mandatory nor a problem for Muslims in India. Other students, stimulated by certain political parties, countered the protests by wearing saffron scarves against hijab. Thus, the hijab row in Iran is a long-standing issue regarding a national law, while the hijab row in Karnataka is a specific instance of hijab-related discrimination.

### **Role of Art in Conflicts**

Throughout history, art forms have played an important role during times of conflict. Performing arts include theatre, music, dance, opera, and other forms of live entertainment where the artist uses their body, voice, or objects to convey an artistic expression. Historically, Greek theatre was often used as a tool for social commentary, political satire, and as a means of examining the human condition during war and political turmoil. In India, theatre has been used since the struggle for independence, and various other movements for social justice. (Pushpa Sundar, 1989) To date, street play, mime, and other forms act as means of communication to educate and mobilize people. The use of music as artistic expression also promotes social and political activism by challenging the dominant cultural narratives. Rap, for instance, is a genre that emerged in African American culture which is used to address issues like racism, police brutality, and social injustice. Artists in recent times, use their bodies and their actions to make a statement. For example, dancers and actors have used their performances to address gender equality and LGBTQ rights, while musicians and poets have used their music and lyrics to call for political and social change. Activism and protest art have also been embraced by various social movements and protest organizations, who use these forms of artistic expression to connect with wider audiences and build support for their cause. These art forms have been used to highlight the struggles and experiences of women as well which is relevant to the Hijab row as well. It is significant to focus on the news coverage of such events to understand the political and cultural significance of the performances and their impact on the wider debate around the hijab requirement. By using their art to inspire and engage people, artists are helping to bring about meaningful and lasting change in society.

### **Artivism and Protest Art in the Protests of Iran and Karnataka**

With only an internet connection, online news is accessible to stay informed about current events and developments from everywhere effortlessly. (Van der Meijden, A. 2017) More than the mainstream media online articles seem to give extensive coverage of lifestyle and culture-based soft news. The online news articles on hijab-based art and performances were collected from online news websites and the Google news. The final set of articles was put together using purposive sampling. A qualitative content analysis of the articles is done to identify the common themes and patterns. This type of analysis clarifies people's experiences and perspectives so that a nuanced interpretation of the topic can be provided. (Krippendorff, K. 2004)

Thus, this study aims to analyze the representation of art and artists in the hijab protests of Iran and Karnataka in online news; to identify the types of performances and their narratives in media coverage; to differentiate between activism and protest art and examine the role of social media in shaping the protests.

### Performing art

It was found that the performing arts covered by the online news media included songs, dance, rap, stage shows, street plays, and fashion shows that were practiced during the hijab protests. Other unique performances included women braiding each other's hair, which meant bringing people together. Shervin Hajipour's 'Barayae' was played in the protest spots. Eventually, it became the unofficial protest anthem and even won a Grammy for the best song for the year for social change.

Type of Art	Name of the Artist
Fashion	Mehrnaz Abdollahian, Sepideh Moafi
Music performance	Ehsan Karmi and Mandana Khazraei
Streetplay	Sania Saifi
Dance	Astiyazh Haghghi and Amir Mohammad Ahmadi
Song	Gola, Shervin Hajipour; Samin and Behin Bolouri; Melek Mosso, Shayan Javadi
Stage show	Farida Jiraphan
Rap	Toomaj Salehi

**Table: 1.** The list of artists and their performances

The protestors had recited the Persian version of the song 'Bella Ciao' on the streets of Iran. The sister duo first performed the song on their social media handle without wearing a hijab. Both Bella Ciao and Baraye became synonymous with the protests in Iran. Apart from the Iranian artists, Turkish Singer Melek Mosso chopped her hair during her performance on stage to support Iranian protests. In fashion, actress Sepideh Moafi represented the Iranian women's uprising at the Golden Globe Awards by wearing a black outfit with a growing red flower on her right hip.

Thespian Farida Jiraphan, staged a 75-minute solo performance named 'Hijab' in a theatre in Thailand. Her performance also portrayed the functions of hijab and how it is banned in a few countries but is required in others. In addition to the revolutionary performances, the artists raised their voices on hijab row through interviews, blogs, and social media handles. Delhi-

based Hijabi theatre artist, Sania Saifi, recalled her experiences when the hijab was banned at her school in Delhi between 2013-2015. To substantiate her devotion to Islam, she then decided to wear a hijab even during her performances. The ‘hijabi’ performer also discussed bullying, religious shaming, and discrimination for wearing it. Since the news coverage focused solely on the artist's personal experiences rather than offering a comprehensive representation of the challenges posed by Muslim artists in India, her decision to wear the hijab during the performances may or may not have had any impact on the discourse surrounding hijab.

### Visual art

The news articles that reported visual art as a medium of protest had extensively covered the works of both Iranian and artists from other countries. The curators from New York and Texas also provided an opportunity to enhance people's voices through painting, photography, and sculptures at the art exhibitions. One of the photographs even coincided with United Nation’s initiative against gender-based violence. From paintings to photographs, the most common themes were struggles of self-censorship, pain from violence, sentiments of the Iranian diaspora, identity, internal conflict, female body experience, and most importantly, “Women, Life, Freedom”. This however was witnessed only outside of Iran. News reports mentioned how art galleries in Tehran are closed and events and art classes are being cancelled because the artists were at the protests. Digital designs and posters also played a significant role in the protests in Iran and Karnataka. Artist Farhadkiaei designed a queen from playing cards cutting her hair, which is a gesture of mourning in Iranian tradition, and became a common sight in Iranian protest.

Type of Art	Name of the Artist
Art Exhibition	JR, Danie Gomez-Ortigoza, Multiple artists
Digital Art	Adeena Hasan, Mark Eisenman
Graffiti	Unknown artist,
Mural Art	Cloe Hakakian, Todd Goodman, AleXsandro Polombo
Painting	Paris Haghghi, Marjaneh Goudarzi
Photographs	Newsha Tavakolian, Maryam Eisler, Neshat
Posters	Ghazal Foroutan, Mahdiah Farhadkiaei, Smishdesigns, Jalz
Sculpture	Maryam Takalou

**Table: 2.** The list of artists and their artwork

Paul Salopek (2011) in his thought-provoking analysis on the significance of graffiti, explores and discusses how graffiti is used to express dissent, resistance, and opposition to oppressive regimes or dominant powers. This was evident when the graffiti against the hijab verdict surfaced anonymously on the walls of the coastal town of Malpe in Udupi, India. A mural of the sitcom character Marge Simpson chopping off her hair was painted by Italian artist AleXsandro Palombo in front of the Iranian Embassy in Milan. Iranian American Artist and Muralist Cloe Hakakian collaborated with Todd Goodman who is well known for his powerful political pieces, to come up with a mural of Masha Amini. All of these were based on, celebrating the courage of the protestors, supporting the brave women, and immortalizing the symbol of women's rights and freedom.

### Other Protest Art

Artivism is the practice of employing art to promote positive social change. Protest art can be classified as artivism, however, it is generally created as an immediate response to a particular political issue. (Sturken, Marita, et al, 2018). Such protest art need not necessarily be a traditional art form, as creating them could take time. When the government implemented the Internet blackout in Iran, a small room-like place was created by artist and art therapist Nazanin Ahmady out of PVC pieces covered in black fabric at an art gallery in Texas. The visitors can take a seat in a lone chair and may utilize a set of headphones that plays a sound that is unsettling and gives the vibe of loneliness and imprisonment. Named "No Signal" this was done to depict how it is to live in modern-day Iran, cut off from the rest of the world without the internet and basic rights, like freedom of speech and expression.

Protest Art	Artist
Dye-in event	Multiple artists
Smearing the fence	Zehra Doğan
Blood red foundation	Unknown
Isolation booth	Nazanin Ahmady

**Table: 3.** Examples of Protest Art

Artists in New York organized "Baraye Azadi: An Evening of Resistance Through Art" which is a die-in event. The fashion brand "Azadi Co" launched t-shirts printed "young women trampling the patriarchy" advocating the feminist movement. The most powerful and symbolic illustration of protest art by making the public sphere as the place of protest was the fountain at a park that was painted red by anonymous. The fountain's red hue served as a potential statement on the violence and suffering of women in Iran, as red is frequently used in art and protests as a symbol of violence, revolution, and blood. The act of coloring the fountain enhances the powerful message of resistance against the government's efforts to suppress opposition and artistic expression. Similarly, in Berlin, the rails of the Iranian

embassy were splashed with a mixture of henna, hair, and menstrual blood by Zehra Doan, a Kurdish journalist, and artist in exile.

### **Arrests**

The 'Baraye' song became the unofficial protest anthem and even won a Grammy for the best song for the year for social change. However, the Iranian singer and songwriter Shervin Hajipour who came up with the song was arrested. Instagram bloggers Astiyazh Haghghi and her fiancé Amir Mohammad Ahmadi were sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for dancing in public and Haghghi was not wearing a hijab. Since both are considered illegal in Iran, the couple was convicted of encouraging corruption, public prostitution, and gathering with the notion of disrupting national security. Haghghi was put to prison which is considered notorious. Another artist who was prosecuted for his song was the hip-hop artist Toomaj Salehi. This depicts Iran's disregard for artistic freedom and its attempt to instil fear among the artists. Although there were mentions of the prison being notorious, no adequate coverage was given to raise concerns about the rights and safety of the female inmates.

### **Role of social media**

Throughout history, protest art has been in physical form. Paula Harper's article on protest art in California against the administration policy in South East Asia concluded that the youngsters who engaged in protest felt that the traditional art forms cannot compete with Television and films and therefore the artists wishing to make a political statement must move to these forms. Today, web 2.0 has replaced the radio and television. In Iran, the usage of social media has given rise to digitally-rendered forms of protests like videos of women cutting their hair and setting their headscarves on fire. The Barayae song was played in the protest spots and was widely shared on social media. Since Haghghi and Ahmadi had a huge social media following, of which the video went viral, ultimately grabbing the judiciary's attention. The Persian version of the song 'Bella Ciao' went viral on social media platforms after being posted on Instagram by Sammin and Behin. Other visual works of digital artists and illustrators spread across the internet and ultimately dispersing the sentiments of women to the world. Apart from the traditional art forms, there were short videos of women cutting their hair and other visuals from the protest spots that spread around. From creating art to disseminating, the impact of social media was so high that the Iranian government imposed an internet- blackout.

In India women issues appears to be the reoccurring theme of the digital illustrations in social media; among them are marital rape, rape culture, and domestic abuse. (Chandrakar & Nayal, 2022) In Karnataka, Muskan, a pre-university college student in burkha shouted back the "Allahu Akbar" slogan against the mob. She soon became the poster girl of pro-hijab protests in India after the video went viral. Followed by this incident, the social media was filled with illustrations that were widely shared all over the world.

## Findings and Discussion

- More coverage on art and artists were found on the Iran protests than that of Karnataka.
- Artists of the Iranian diaspora from around the world contributed to the protests.
- Most of the artists supporting Iranian protests were from the USA (San Francisco, New York, Washington, Texas, Los Angeles); other countries included Thailand and Milan.
- Despite the internet shutdown in Iran, Iranian-American artists and exiles continued to have access to social media and were instrumental in getting the information out to the rest of the world.
- Artivism in Iran lead to multiple arrests and imprisonment of artists living in Tehran.
- Intervention of USA in the affairs of Iran could be found - the protest song was awarded the Golden Globe; exhibitions and performances in the USA were collaborated with UN.
- TikTok and Instagram are found to be the most used social media platforms in Iran; while in India, the digital arts were circulated on Twitter.
- Minimal news coverage on art and artists was found in the case of Karnataka's hijab row.
- The participation of 160 cities, and 143 universities, and the impact of social media made the hijab protests in Iran more impactful than that of Karnataka.
- With social media platforms, the convergence of performance and visual arts was made possible.

To conclude, women in both countries are resisting against a law that interferes with their rights. The issue comes down to the political climate and the nature of protests in both countries. Iran has been under Islamic rule for decades and the protests were led by broader sections of women, whereas a smaller number of activists led the protests in Karnataka, which were concentrated on the dress code for female students in a particular State. In this particular study emphasizes lies only on the significance of protest art and artivism in the hijab row of Iran and Karnataka. While the news coverage discusses the various art forms, it is evident from the findings that the role of social media in amplifying the reach of these art forms has been inevitable. In Iran, even when the artists and the protestors were imprisoned, their works were out there to the world, through Instagram, and Tik Tok which played a major role in propagating the issue. In the context of Karnataka, there was less scope for artistic expression in physical form, given the religious polarization in the State of Karnataka. It was only due to social media, the artworks inspired by Muskan's bravery were shared with the hashtag #AllahuAkbar. Therefore, the protests in both places were a combination of online activism and offline actions based on art. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to consider social media a vital tool for promoting activism through visual means.



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## THE RISE OF FACT-CHECKING AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE MODERN WORKPLACE

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### Abstract

*"The Rise of Fact-checking and its Importance in the Modern Workplace" is a riveting investigation into the art of fact-checking, which is becoming an increasingly important skill in today's constantly changing work environment. The capacity to differentiate between factual correctness and misinformation has become a crucial skill for both employees and employers in today's quickly expanding global labour market, which is characterized by the explosion of information and the digital age. A democratization of information distribution has occurred as a result of the proliferation of social media and the internet, which has provided individuals with unprecedented access to large volumes of data. On the other hand, this has also resulted in a concerning growth in the number of people spreading false information and "fake news." As a consequence of this, individuals and organizations are confronted with the task of navigating an information landscape that is rife with rumours, deliberate deception, and inaccurate information. For this reason, numerous governments and organizations that are not for profit are establishing fact-checking units with the objective of preventing the dissemination of inaccurate information. The following research is an attempt to investigate several organizations that are either in the process of incorporating fact-checking desks into their organizational structure or have already done so.*

**Keywords:** Fake News, Employment, Fact Check, Organization, New skill

### Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving world, the ability to distinguish between reliable information and misinformation has become increasingly crucial. With the rise of fake news and biased narratives, fact-checking has emerged as a valuable skill in the employment landscape. Being able to verify the accuracy and credibility of claims and sources is not only beneficial in media and journalism but is now sought after across various industries.

Talley (2023) stated that employers are recognizing the importance of fact-checking as it directly impacts decision-making processes, reputation management, and overall business operations. Companies are now prioritizing candidates who possess the critical skill of fact-checking as it contributes to more informed and responsible decision-making at all levels.

Fact-checking, also known as fact-checking, fact-checking, or fact-based fact-checking, is the practice of verifying the accuracy of reported information and statements that have been cross-referenced. It can be done prior to (ante hoc), during (post hoc), or after the publication or distribution of the information or content. The purpose of an Ante hoc Fact-Check is to detect errors in the text so that they can be rectified prior to distribution or may be rejected. Post hoc Fact-Checking is typically conducted in the form of a written report of the inaccuracies, sometimes accompanied by a visual metric supplied by the checking organization.

Internal fact-checking (also known as internal fact-checking) is in-house fact-checking done by a publisher to prevent the publication of inaccurate content. External fact-checking, on the other hand, is when a third party analyzes the text.

Fact-checking involves scrutinizing claims, verifying sources, and cross-referencing information. It requires a strong eye for detail, critical thinking abilities, and research proficiency. By fact-checking, professionals can unearth hidden truths, counter misleading narratives, and ensure the dissemination of accurate information (Mcguire, 2023). In addition to its practical applications, fact-checking also plays a significant role in promoting media literacy among individuals. It equips people with the tools to navigate the vast array of information available today and empowers them to make informed decisions. Fact-checking enables us to separate factual content from fiction, promoting a more transparent and accountable information ecosystem (Solin, 2023).

As the digital age continues to shape our world, fact-checking is becoming an increasingly essential skill for individuals seeking employment opportunities. It not only enhances one's ability to critically analyze information but also contributes to the overall well-being of society. By embracing fact-checking as a new skill for employment, we can foster a culture of accuracy, truth, and integrity in our professional and personal lives (M. Perez-Escolar et al., 2021).

"Fact Check: A New Skill for Employment" presents an exploration of the growing importance of fact-checking in today's digital age. As the proliferation of online platforms and social media continues to shape our lives, the ability to discern accurate information from falsehoods has become a crucial skill for individuals seeking employment. In an era where information spreads quickly and often without proper verification, employers are increasingly valuing candidates who possess the competency to verify facts and critically evaluate sources (Crespí & García-Ramos, 2021).

To acquire and enhance fact-checking skills, individuals can undergo specialized training programs, workshops, and online courses that cover topics such as information verification techniques, source evaluation, and critical thinking. These resources can help individuals develop a sceptical mindset and become proficient in discerning between credible and unreliable sources (Fernandez-Arias et al., 2020).

Fact-checking has emerged as a crucial skill for employment in today's digital era. It enables individuals to distinguish between accurate information and misinformation, making them valuable assets in any professional setting. By honing their fact-checking skills, individuals can contribute to a more informed and reliable society, both professionally and personally (Van der Linden et al., 2021). The following paper is an in-depth analysis of fact-checking emerging as an emerging employment sector.

### **Objective**

- To identify the job opportunities in fact-checking skill
- To find out the emerging opportunities in fact-checking skills
- To find out the relevance of fact-checking as employment

### **Methodology**

An extensive literature survey was carried out to understand fact-checking as a new skill for employment. The researcher has tried to understand the topic by collecting articles related to the topic from various sources like journals, books, newspapers, and experts. The collected articles and materials were then categorized and compiled under different headings.

### **Review of literature**

The dissemination of disinformation is a global issue. Porter et. Al. (2021) stated that misinformation has been attributed to the genocides in Myanmar, as well as to the national elections and the re-emergence of measles. Various strategies have been studied to reduce the prevalence of misinformation, such as fact-checking, but much of the evidence for a decrease in false beliefs is derived from single-country samples collected in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Furthermore, the evidence for a reduction in false beliefs is limited in scope, as it does not consider the potential for accuracy increases that may be generated by fact-checking in a particular country. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of fact-checking in reducing false beliefs in a single country. However, the extent to which fact-checking has a global impact on the prevalence of misinformation and if any such reductions have been sustained is unknown (Rick et al., 2022).

Porter et. Al (2019) examined fact-checkers as essential components of the journalistic process. Almost all periodicals (including newspapers, journals, etc.) employ them, as well as scholastic publishing houses, non-fiction publishers, and many digital publications. Fact-checking is typically carried out by the publisher in which an article is to be published. Not only are fact-checkers responsible for verifying the veracity of the information contained in an article, but they are also responsible for double-checking the accuracy of sources and interviewees' statements to ensure that they are accurately represented. As a result, they must rapidly become experts in the subject matter of their assigned article. The fact-checking process can range from a single week or two for short articles to a period of months or years for a book-length publication. In this scenario, the fact-checker is employed by a well-known magazine (Kreps et al., 2020).

A five-day seminar on the topic of "Fact-checking in Caption Video Format" was held at NAEMM from February 18 to February 22, 2020, with the keynote speaker being Mr Mohammad Althaher, a Jordanian expert in the field of fact-checking. The purpose of the workshop was to increase the awareness of media professionals on the importance of fact-checking as a part of media information literacy and a necessary skill for the 21st century. "I want to keep working on identifying fakes in media and dive into this field as much as I can because I can't keep watching how quickly false news, pictures, and videos spread in the world right now. This training has helped me a lot in terms of my professional skills and knowledge." Bekzod Abdullayev shared his thoughts on the training.

Mr. Althaher also held a fact-based lecture for students at the University of Journalism and Mass Communication on February 22., 2023. He talked about what misinformation and disinformation are, how Twitter can become a platform for fake content, and what challenges journalists today need to be ready for in the world of information. The workshop was put together by UNESCO's Tashkent office in collaboration with NAEMM and the Modern Journalism Development Center. It was part of a UNESCO project to help Uzbek media produce more objective, inclusive, high-quality content for the public. The project is Phase II, which is funded by the UK government and is estimated to cost \$190,450. It's all about helping Uzbek media become more capable of serving the public.

Printing only checked copy avoids serious, and sometimes expensive, issues. These issues may include lawsuits for errors that harm people or companies, but even minor errors can damage a publication's reputation. In fact, reputation loss is often the most important reason for journalists to hire a fact-checker.

A fact-checker verifies that the name, date, and facts of an article or a book are accurate. For instance, they might contact a person quoted in a draft news article to see if the quotation is accurate or to ask how the person's name should be spelt. A fact-checker's main job is to catch mistakes, not to protect journalists from journalistic fraud.

Stephen Glass started out in the business of fact-checking. Then he started making up stories to pass off as news. The New Republic and other weeklies he worked for never fact-checked any of them. Michael Kelly (who edited several of Glass's made-up stories) accused him of sabotaging the fact-checking process. Kelly said, "Any system of fact-checking is based on trust. If a journalist is willing to forge notes, it undermines the system. In any case, the fact-checking isn't fact-checking; it's the editor."

The proliferation of false information on the internet has necessitated the development of guidelines to assist readers in verifying the information they are ingesting. Numerous universities across the United States provide university students with resources and tools to assist them in verifying their sources. Universities offer access to research guides to assist students in conducting in-depth research with reliable sources within the academic community. Providing procedural guidelines to assist individuals in navigating the process of

fact-checking a source provided by organizations such as FactCheck.org, OntheMedia.org, org; and PolitiFact.com, com (Rose et al., 2020).

## **Results and Discussions**

Our capacity to differentiate between truth and fiction is frequently outpaced by the rapid and unrestricted flow of information that we experience in this age of hyper connectivity. As a result of the fact that misinformation and disinformation can have negative repercussions for both individuals and organizations, this information inundation poses a huge challenge. Since this danger has been recognized, the demand for fact-checking has significantly increased over the past few years, and it has become an instrument that is essential in the contemporary workplace.

One of the most crucial skills that is becoming more and more relevant in today's environment is the ability to check facts. Misinformation and disinformation are more readily disseminated than they have ever been before, thanks to the proliferation of social media and the internet. When it comes to ensuring that the public has access to accurate information, fact-checkers perform an extremely important role.

There is an increasing demand for fact-checkers in a range of industries, including journalism, public relations, government, and technology, among others. Before any material is published or made available to the public, it is necessary to have fact-checkers verify that the information is accurate. In addition to this, they play a significant part in disproving erroneous claims and bringing incorrect information to light.

A study conducted by the University of California; Berkeley found that fact-checking is a new ability that is becoming increasingly important for employment. In the past five years, the number of positions that include fact-checking has increased by a factor of one hundred per cent, according to the findings of the study. Fact-checkers are in great demand across a wide range of industries, including journalism, public relations, government, and technology, according to the findings of the study published in the same year.

The practice of fact-checking has expanded beyond its roots in journalism and is now utilized in a wide variety of fields and departments. Within the realms of marketing and public relations, it guarantees the precision and authenticity of the messaging, thereby protecting the reputation of the business and developing trust with the customers. Maintaining ethical standards, maintaining compliance with rules, and limiting financial risks are all areas in which it plays a significant role in the domains of finance and law. Even departments that deal with human resources look to fact-checking as a means of vetting candidates and investigating possible instances of misbehaviour.

The procedures of fact-checking need to be updated in tandem with the ongoing transformation of the information landscape. Automation of information verification, increased efficiency, and the management of an ever-increasing volume of content are all



potential outcomes that could be facilitated by technological developments such as artificial intelligence and machine learning. Nevertheless, human judgment and critical analysis continue to be indispensable, which is why collaboration between technology experts, fact-checkers, and individuals from a wide range of industries is necessary for the future of fact-checking.

Over the course of the past several years, there has been a significant shift in the information landscape all around the world. The internet has made knowledge more accessible to more people, which has resulted in an explosion of content that goes beyond national boundaries and linguistic barriers. Although this access has been crucial in fostering innovation and global interconnection, it has also provided a substantial issue in the shape of the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation.

Individuals and organizations across the world have recently become aware of the serious consequences that might result from spreading false information. Considering this, fact-checking has developed into an instrument that is necessary in the contemporary workplace, regardless of the location. This pattern can be seen in several different regions:

- **Europe:** Europe has witnessed a considerable increase in the number of fact-checking activities, which can be attributed to the region's robust internet infrastructure and broad media ecosystem. The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) is a significant presence in the region, with groups such as Full Fact (United Kingdom), Correctiv (Germany), and AFP Factuel (France) playing a significant role.
- **North America:** Particularly in response to the proliferation of political disinformation, the United States of America has seen an increase in the number of fact-checking groups such as PolitiFact, Snopes, and FactCheck.org over the past few years. There has also been an increase in the number of fact-checking initiatives in Canada, such as the Canadian Fact-Checking Network.
- **Asia:** India, China, and Japan are among the Asian nations that are experiencing a rise in the need for fact-checking services. There are still a number of obstacles to overcome, such as language problems, limited resources, and censorship provided by the government. Nevertheless, organizations such as Alt News (India) and FactCheck Initiative (China) are making significant progress in their fight against the spread of disinformation.
- **Latin America:** There has been an increasing number of fact-checking initiatives in the region, such as Chequeado (Argentina), Agencia Lupa (Brazil), and La Silla Vacía (Colombia). Despite this, there are still obstacles to overcome, such as the limited backing from the government and the lack of knowledge among the general people.
- **Africa:** Despite the fact that fact-checking programs are still in the process of developing in Africa, they are already playing an important part in the fight against disinformation regarding topics such as elections and health. This region is being led by organizations such as Africa Check and PesaCheck, which are at the forefront of the movement.

Misinformation and disinformation have developed in India because of the quick spread of information on the internet. This, in conjunction with the limited access to reliable sources, has provided a fertile foundation for the proliferation of these two types of information. Since the transmission of false information can have a negative impact on the reputation of a brand, the trust of consumers, and the stability of financial resources, this has significant ramifications for businesses that are doing operations within the country.

In India, consumers are becoming more aware of the dangers that are associated with incorrect information, and they are demanding that businesses demonstrate a higher degree of openness and responsibility within their operations. Because of this, there has been a rise in the demand for information that has been checked by fact-checkers in the workplace. This is because businesses are trying to guarantee that their communication and decision-making are accurate.

Restrictions in India are being applied to an increasing number of businesses, and these restrictions put these industries under the need to verify the correctness of the information that they communicate. This has resulted in an even greater growth in the demand for fact-checking knowledge within firms. This is because compliance with such standards is crucial for avoiding legal implications and maintaining a favorable image.

To acquire a more in-depth comprehension of the emergence of fact-checking and its influence on modern workplaces, interviews were carried out with professionals from a variety of professions. Following are some recommendations that have been offered based on the findings from the interview:

- The first professional is of the opinion that organizations ought to seriously consider the possibility of allocating funds and staff to develop fact-checking teams or to make use of external fact-checking services.
- In the second professional's opinion, staff ought to be provided with the abilities necessary to successfully analyze information and recognize falsehoods. If clarification is required, staff should be encouraged to challenge information, verify sources, and seek clarification.
- The third professional believes that there is a need to investigate software and technologies that can simplify the process of fact-checking. Some examples of these tools and technology are automated verification algorithms and search engines driven by artificial intelligence.

The practice of fact-checking has been observed to have a positive impact on the culture of an organization. This is as it contributes to the development of a sense of trust, transparency, and accountability. Workers are provided with the opportunity to make decisions based on accurate information, open communication is encouraged, and the chance of errors and accidents that are caused by wrong information is reduced because of this.

The data and debates presented here, which are derived from interviews, offer significant insights into the increasing role of fact-checking in the modern workplace. By first getting a knowledge of the benefits, problems, and future trends connected with this crucial practice, organizations can build successful ways to ensure the correctness and dependability of information. This can be accomplished once the organizations have gained this understanding. In this way, corporations can empower their people and safeguard their success in the information-rich environment that characterizes the current world.

## Conclusion

It is also possible that in the future of fact-checking, there may be significant advancements in terms of technology, breadth, and strategy. This is an encouraging outlook in general. The practice of fact-checking has evolved into an indispensable component of true and accurate reporting in today's environment, which is characterized by an abundance of information. enterprises can safeguard their reputations, empower their employees, and contribute to the growth of a society that is more aware and discerning if they implement fact-checking procedures across their enterprises. Even though we are navigating the nuances of the digital information world, our commitment to fact-checking remains to be an unyielding obligation for a future that is focused on truth and clarity.

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## ONLINE NEWS AGGREGATORS: A STUDY OF THE NEWS CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR OF THE USERS

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### Introduction

Internet has changed the news consumption habits and behaviours of the people. Studies show that people are preferring to consume news through online mediums than traditional news media like print, television and radio. Most of them consume online news through smartphones (Vanapala, 2022). Recognising the strength of the online media, now most of the traditional news outlets have their strong presence in the online sphere. But online medium has its own challenges. Users can shift their attention in a click of the mouse. So, most news outlets try hard to grab the user attention and adopt ways to engage with them. To make the online content more impressive, diverse and engaging, some news outlets have started giving space to the personal blogs, opinions and photos of the users. BBC had started an initiative, where it invites photos clicked by the users and give space to it on their online platform.

Similarly, big print outlets like Guardian also started publishing users' blogs to its online platform but online avatars of traditional news outlets are eating revenue of its traditional version. United States' Congressional Research Service (CRS) says that newspaper's main source of income is advertising and its share in newspaper' income is almost 80%. CRS finds that after bombardment of news on internet, corporate advertisers have started preferring online advertising as a cheaper and easiest way to make their product visible globally. As a result, daily newspaper advertisement revenue dropped significantly during 2005 to 2009 which is 44%. The CRS report also indicated that in 2009, internet was only medium which showed growth in the advertisement revenue.

As newspapers and other traditional news outlets are trying hard to cope with this increasing online news consumption habits and decreasing revenue, online news aggregators gave a new challenge to them in terms of readership and revenue generation. Online news aggregators are platforms which disseminates content of different publishers from one platform by applying certain curation methods (Hanff, 2016). It gives an option to the news consumers to surf the desired content at one place published by different news outlets. But online news aggregators posed a major threat to the individual news outlets. A study by Lee & Chyi (2015) discloses that online news aggregators, for example, Yahoo News, Google News and Huffington Post has caused a threat to traditional news outlets and have become main source of news for the people of America. The study says that after facing decline in advertisement revenue, traditional news outlets blame news aggregators for stealing their content and audience.

News aggregators pick content from different traditional news outlets and display it on their home page as per the set of rules defined individually. For example, Google News displays



the content of news outlets as per their own algorithm and user preferences and Yahoo News takes help of their editorial staff for the curation of the content.

Studies show that online news aggregators are acting as a hub for the dissemination of news. But there are two views regarding aggregators. One view put them as ‘substitutes’ because they provide news snippets and photograph of stories of different news outlets at one place. In this scenario, the user may tend to not to click the link of the news content for further read which reduces traditional news outlets’ opportunity to get more user attention and they lose revenue in the long run. Another view looks at the online news aggregators as ‘complements’ as they help the user to find variety of stories from different sources at one platform and therefore drive the traffic to traditional news outlets’ platform, if user want more details of the story.

News publishers and online news aggregators may have different perspectives about each other but there is one important aspect of the end users who consume news to fulfil their needs. So, it is very pertinent to know how people are consuming news on news aggregators’ platform and how it is affecting user base of online news platforms. It will be significant to know that news consumers are using online news aggregators’ platform actively or passively. Are they consuming the available content on news aggregator’s platform without applying their mind or they are using the aggregator’s platform to gratify their different needs? So this study tries to explore the use of aggregators’ platform from user’s perspective. A study by Lee & Chyi (2015) explored this aspect by taking uses and gratification paradigm and concluded that there are certain predictors for news aggregator’s usage by the consumers. They indicated two factors for news consumption on aggregator’s platform. These are demographic and psychological factor. This study was done on 1143 United States adults using an online survey and it was ensured that participants reflect the diverse composition of country’s population. The researchers found that demographically, young and non-white people use aggregators’ platform. A research by Pew Research Centre in 2012 concludes that TV news viewers and daily newspaper consumers are generally older people (Pew Research Center, 2020).

One more study by Athey & Mobius (2012) was conducted in France, where Google news consumers were asked to enter their location on home page so that local news can be curated accordingly for the respective user. The study finds that users who opted for localised feature, increased their Google news consumption. Also, users directly went to the respective local news websites, which they had discovered on Google News’ platform. This study shows that introduction of local feature in Google news increased the local news consumption significantly.

The studies mentioned above show that users are navigating on news aggregators’ platform to gratify their different needs. Their news consumption habits change significantly, when content is modified. The study of Lee & Chyi (2015) also identified that news consumers use aggregators’ platform apolitically and they go on the concerned platform only for news, not



for opinions. The results of the above-mentioned studies show that user behaviour on news aggregator's platform change when they are exposed to different content. So this study adopts secondary research method to collect data from the previous studies about news consumers behaviour on online news aggregators' platform and analyse it to yield common thread in their findings and give broader perspective to the results.

**Key Words:** News Aggregators, Traditional News Outlets, Online News Outlets, Online News Consumers.

### **Review of Literature**

News aggregators are playing a significant role in online news consumption sphere. They give users a unique platform, where news stories from different sources can be scanned and opted for consumption. There are several studies which has focused on different aspects on online news aggregators. A study by Lee & Chyi (2015) finds that traditional news outlets are facing fierce completion from news aggregators such as Yahoo News, Huffington Post and Google News. It says that from demand perspective, the relation between online news aggregators and traditional news outlets has not got proper attention of scholars. This study explored uses and gratification paradigm to know the news consumer behaviour and concluded that there are certain predictors for news aggregator's usage by the consumers. They indicated two factors for news consumption on aggregator's platform. These are demographic and psychological factor. This study was done on 1143 United States adults using an online survey and it was ensured that participants reflect the diverse composition of country's population. The researchers found that demographically, young and non-white people use aggregators' platform. So age and ethnicity are two important factors for the use of aggregators. Similarly, opinion motivation can be considered as only non-predictor in psychological factor which implies that users don't go to aggregator's platform to consume views or content which is opinion driven. Instead they want to consume news as per their need. This study included three major news aggregators of United States, Google News, Yahoo News, Huffington Post and 13 prominent traditional news outlets (Print, TV and Social Media) and concluded that there is a non-competitive relationship between them which means that aggregators are not a challenge for traditional news outlets.

Another important study conducted by Calzada & Gil (2020) in Spain explores the effect of shutdown of Google News in the country. This study talks about two effects of news aggregators, expansion effect and substitution effect. It examines the aggregators' expansion effect, which brings traffic to traditional news outlets' own website and substitution effect where users prefer to consume content on aggregator's platform only and don't click on the link of the traditional new outlet to get detailed information. This study concluded that when Google News was shut down in Spain, it had a negative impact on traditional news outlets' online presence. Their daily traffic decreased by almost 14%. This decrease in traffic was more prominent to the outlets, which had a smaller number of daily visitors and low share of international news consumers compared to those outlets, which had good number of

international visitors to their platform. This study also concluded that big news outlets lost online advertisement revenue due to the shutdown.

This study also explored Google News shutdown in Germany in 2014 and its effect on online news publishers. The study shows that when Google News again started its operation in Spain with an option of 'opt-in policy', news outlets who opted out and did not permit Google News to use their content on Google's platform, didn't see any significant change in their daily visits of news consumers. However, outlets which are controlled by the largest publisher of Germany, Axel Springer, faced 8% decrease in their number of daily visitors. As a whole, this study establishes that online news aggregators play a vital role in increasing consumers' awareness about news outlets, familiarize them with their content and increase traffic to their websites.

One more study by Jeon & Nasr (2016) was done to explore if news aggregators impact the quality of content of different news outlets, which competes with each other on aggregators' platform to attract user attention. This study finds that after coming on aggregator's platform, newspapers tend to improve the quality of their content. It says that when aggregator index content of newspaper and thereby increases the traffic to their website, it improves the quality of newspaper's online content.

Do aggregators play any role to attract attention of users? One of the traditional news outlets' concerns is that aggregators don't give them level playing field and curate their content on its platform as per the policies of aggregation platform. A study by Dellarocas, Sutanto, Calin & Palme (2016) tries to answer this and highlights some trend of users' behaviour, when exposed to different placement of same content on aggregator's platform. This study focuses how users pay attention to the content, when consuming it on aggregator's platform. This research explores if key design specifications such as text snippet's length on aggregator's platform, related image and articles associated with the same story play any role in influencing user's behaviour to go to original content producer's site to read the full article. The findings of study show that there is a substitution relation between how much amount of text any aggregator shows on their platform and probability that user will go to the site of content producer to read the full story. Also, when user is exposed to several stories on the same topic on aggregators' platform, the story with longer snippet and image has the maximum probability to be chosen by the user.

A significant study on users' behaviour and aggregation of content was done by Chiou & Tucker (2017). This study finds that when Google News eliminated all the content of Associated Press (AP) after a dispute with renowned news agency of the world, very low 'scanning effect' was observed where users see news aggregators as substitutes for traditional news outlets. The study finds that instead news aggregators complement consumption of news for traditional news outlets and shows 'traffic effect'. It means that there was a little probability that Google News users will go to other news websites to consume the content generated by AP.

How users utilize news aggregators and how content on aggregators can affect consumption of news have been shown by a study of Athey & Mobius (2012). It reveals that when users activated a localized feature on Google News by adding their local pin code, consumption of Google News increased. Also, users started going to new news sites directly to consume local news which they had discovered through Google News.

A study by Athey, Mobius & Pal (2017) has investigated role of news aggregator in internet news consumption. Findings of this study illustrates that shut down of Google News in Spain resulted in less news consumption by treatment users. Also, page views of publishers are decreased by 10%. Interestingly only small publishers felt this decrease in page views and large publishers didn't felt any significant change in traffic to their sites. Also, users were able to find some of the news types they used to read previously on Google News. However, they read less breaking news and other stories which were not covered by their favourite traditional news outlet.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to see if users of online news aggregators are gratifying their needs by consuming news on it. As Lee & Chyi (2015) describe that the word, 'online news aggregators', are being widely used by media and market reports but little is known about aggregators' users' characteristics. In the light of the above statement, this study will try to explore how people are using news aggregators, what are their needs and expectations from them and how they are gratifying these needs by using it. This study will try to answer these questions by looking at the findings of previous studies and see if users are getting what they want from online news aggregator's platform.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) which focuses on users' perspective rather than what media is doing to them. This theory states that audience is not passive; they are very much active and choose a suitable media to gratify their different needs.

This theory states that people use media to gratify their cognitive, affective, personal integrative and social integrative needs. This study explores if people are gratifying all these needs by using online news aggregator's platform when they are exposed to news stories on diverse topics there.

## Research Questions

On the basis of objective of this research, following research questions has been framed.

- RQ1: Do users of online news aggregators gratifying their needs by using it? If yes, then how?
- RQ2: What is the pattern of aggregator's users? Demographically it may be the age, gender, race and psychologically it may be motivations to use aggregators.
- RQ3: How news consumer's needs are influencing traditional news outlets' online content on aggregator's platform?
- RQ4: Do display of content on aggregators' platform influence users' consumption behaviour and affect their gratification needs?
- RQ5: Why people come to aggregator's platform? Do they go there to gratify their news need or opinion driven need?

## Research Methodology

This study follows secondary research approach and incorporates qualitative research methodology. For this, text analysis of different research papers focusing on online news aggregators and user behaviour have been done. After identifying the common trends and relevant results, interpretation and conclusion has been drawn from them.

This study has identified seven research papers for the text analysis after excluding several research papers exploring news aggregator's domain. There are many research findings incorporating different aspects of online news aggregators but this study has tried to analyze only those papers, who fits into uses and gratification paradigm. For this, Google Scholar's search engine help has been taken to find the appropriate studies related to the topic. Google Scholar yields 26200 results searching it with the key word 'News Aggregators'.

Since lots of studies on news aggregators have been done by taking the aspect of social media and its impact on aggregators and vice versa, to fulfil the need of our study we exclude the social media related studies to concentrate only on the theme of news aggregators and its impact on user behaviour. When we searched Google Scholar by excluding the word 'social Media' the results showed 42 research papers related to the subject. Again, lots of studies are being done on news aggregators by taking the angle of blogs, hot doctrine, law-copyright, bots, dictionary and technology etc. we carefully excluded papers incorporating these topics and included only those papers, which deal with the news aggregators and its impact on traditional media outlets as well as users of aggregators. So, by applying these filter criteria, this study has identified research papers which are primarily related with this study's research objective by applying uses and gratification paradigm.

## Discussion and Analysis

Online news aggregators have changed the habits and behaviour of online news consumers significantly and lots of studies have been done related to aggregator's role and impact on traditional news outlets as well as aggregators role as an information hub for its users. This study tries to explore how people are using news aggregators and gratifying their different needs and what pattern we can identify based on the findings of the research papers selected for this study.

The primary research question (RQ1) of this study is about user's news consumption needs and their desire to gratify it. RQ1 says that do people need news aggregating platforms to gratify their needs and how they are doing it? This question leads to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: People use news aggregators as a platform to fulfil their different aspirations or needs and when they see certain information useful for them, they select and consume it.

Interpretation and Discussion: The study of Athey & Mobius (2012) proves this hypothesis true as their study finds that when users were provided an opportunity to include local feature, they chose it and after that, among vast variety of news content, they went to consume local stories more on Google News. Also, news outlets which were focusing on local news, their website traffic increased by 5%. It means that news consumers who came to know about these traditional local news outlets opt to go directly to their website to consume local news with going to Google News platform. The study of Athey and Mobius (2012) explored the introduction of a new feature on Google News, Local News, in France in 2009. Google put a new feature on their platform where users can enter their zip code and then were able to see more news from local news outlets which were displayed prominently on its platform.

This study finds that users who went for local news, they increased their Google News home page consumption by 50% which is very significant. It means that users were finding the content very useful as per their needs and to gratify them, they increased its consumption. The study also revealed some interesting facts about news browsing habit after addition of local news feature. It finds a 12% increase in the usage of local news outlets. Also, treatment users went for local outlets 10% more than controlled users to consume local news. But there was no prominent change in the visitor pattern of old local outlets between treatment and control users. It means that local feature made users acquainted to new local news outlets, which they continue to visit.

These findings prove that aggregator users are active, not passive and aggregators platform introduce them to new news outlets, from which they chose the content as per their need. It also signifies uses and gratification paradigm and proves our hypothesis-1 right because first of all, users chose the required local content from numerous options on aggregator's platform and then continue to consume it afterwards to gratify their respective need.

Our second research question (RQ2) is about the consumption pattern of aggregator's users and how significant it is demographically or psychologically? Another research question (RQ5) inquires that do people come to aggregator's platform to gratify their news need or opinion driven need?

**The research question leads to following hypothesis.**

**Hypothesis 2:** Aggregator users have different demographic and psychological needs and they gratify them accordingly.

**Interpretation and Discussion:** A study by Lee & Chyi (2015) gives some answers to hypothesis-2 which states that age, ethnicity are demographic factors and news, not opinion, is the psychological factor for the usage of aggregator platform. The study is based on a national survey on 1143 internet users of United States and applies uses and gratification paradigm for its findings. The main objective of this study is to find out who (demographic factor) is using online news aggregators and for what purpose (Psychological factor). Lee and Chyi (2015) states that till date, no study is being done to identify predictors of aggregator's use (Who uses it for why) and their study will try to identify some factors which motivates people to go for news aggregators by taking uses and gratification paradigm.

Their study incorporated three major news aggregators of United States, Google News, Yahoo News and Huffington Post as well as 13 major Print, TV and Social Media outlets. They took six demographic factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, education, income and ideology as well as four psychological factors such as entertainment, information, social and opinion motivations as predictors of news aggregator consumption.

The findings of this study prove that our hypothesis-2 is correct as different demographic and psychological needs drive people to use news aggregators. The study finds that Yahoo News users are slightly older than users of Google News and Huffington Post and they tend to be white (55%). At the same time, Huffington Post users are younger compared to other two aggregators, majority of them are females (54%) and chances of them to be white are few (45%). But they are better educated (bachelor and above), have money and are more liberal in their thoughts (28%).

Further, Lee and Chyi (2015) identified a significant difference between aggregator users and non-users in respect of age and ethnicity. Their study illustrates that younger and non-white people use news aggregator's platforms more than others.

Also, their study indicates psychological predictors for aggregators use. These are information motivations (to be informed about the latest happenings), Social motivations (To keep a pace with other people's knowledge) and Entertainment motivations. They find that opinion motivations (to get an idea of other's opinions or to be able to form opinion of his own) are not the predictors of news aggregators use which means that people go there to consume news only, not views or opinions.



The above findings suggest that people are using news aggregators to gratify their different needs in a very thoughtful manner. People know what they want from which source and why they need a particular content. It means that they gratify their needs through news aggregator's platform very efficiently which reflects that the hypothesis 2 of this study is true.

Now since aggregator users are gratifying their needs from the platforms of their choice, it is imperative to enquire how aggregators are influencing traditional news outlets that are competing with each other on its platform to grab the user attention.

Our research question, RQ3, deals with this problem which brings following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis-3:** Traditional news outlets continuously improve their content on aggregator's platform to attract user's attention and users select most appealing content on aggregator's platform to gratify their needs.

The study of Jeon & Nasr (2016) throws light on quality of the newspaper's online content on aggregator's platform. The findings of the study states that competing newspapers in their online avatar continuously improve the quality of their content on aggregator's platform to attract more user attention and drive traffic to their own site. Simultaneously it improves the quality of the newspaper as well.

For this study, one aggregator and two newspapers were taken and their competition on the online mode is studied. This study takes the help of 'Hotelling Model' to find its results. It was assumed that in the absence of aggregator, the user consumes only one newspaper and in the presence of aggregator, the consumer chooses one newspaper from two given options of newspapers and the aggregator.

Jeon & Nasr (2016) talked about two effects in this study between newspapers and news aggregators. These are 'Business stealing effect' and 'Reader expansion effect'. Business stealing effect is being described as when newspaper's home page faces decrease in traffic as some users move to aggregator's homepage for news consumption. Reader expansion effect says that if newspapers use high quality content on aggregator's platform, they get extra readers or traffic to their home page through aggregators' platform. They are not loyal, but new readers for the newspapers. Their study concluded that in each scenario, when newspapers are symmetric or asymmetric, aggregators motivate them to publish quality content so that they can attract traffic from aggregator's platform to their site.

So, competition on internet among news outlets has a positive effect for users and society at large. It demonstrates that by improving quality and specialization of content, news outlets try to gratify the different needs of aggregator's users and divert traffic to their own site. On their own site too, news outlets provide content variety to users for their different needs and all these process starts with aggregator platform. These findings make the hypothesis-3 of this study true, which means that competition between news outlets on aggregators' platform enhance the quality of news outlet's content and gratify needs of the news consumers.

The research question (RQ4) of this study enquires that do the display of content on aggregator's platform influence users' news consumption and affect their need-gratification behaviour? To answer this question, following hypothesis can be formed.

**Hypothesis-4:** Display of news content on aggregator platform influence user's behaviour and they gratify their needs either on aggregators' platform or go to news outlets' site from there.

A study by Dellarocas, Sutanto, Calin, & Palme (2016) tries to find answer of this hypothesis. They manipulated user interface of a Swiss mobile news aggregator by increasing or decreasing text length or adding images to news stories and observed the user's behaviour how they consumed the news under the influence of display of same content in the defined probabilities. The result of the study shows that when aggregator shows significant amount of content on its platform, there is less probability that users will go to news outlet's website to get more in-depth information. Also, when several news outlets compete with each other on aggregator's platform to attract more user attention, then there is a tendency that user will select that content, which has larger text and an image associated with it. Results of their study also state that headline of any news content matters most. It affects user's decision to decide to read the content further. Additional information in the content on the aggregator's platform only decreases user's appetite to consume it in detail at news outlet's own website and they are less likely to click the respective link to get the content in detail.

Their study talks about content ecosystem and says that impact of aggregators on this ecosystem is sum of two different effects. In first case, aggregators provide snippets or short text of links according to which users decides if they want to consume the content or not. If content appeals to them, they consume it and thus improve the consumption of the content in the entire eco-system. It's a positive effect. In the second case, a free riding effect rules the eco-system, where users simply scan the headlines and snippets of the content on aggregator's platform and never click on the corresponding link to read the full and original stuff.

The results of the study of Dellarocas, Sutanto, Calin & Palme (2016) shows Hypothesis-4 of this study is correct. Display of the content on aggregator's platform plays a vital role in selection and gratification process. In the influence of display of content, aggregator users decide which is best suitable for them and then proceed to gratify their specific needs accordingly. If they find that they have gratified their need by consuming the text on aggregator's platform, they won't go to content creator's site. But when they feel that snippet or associated image of the content is not enough to gratify their specific need, they click on the corresponding link and go to news outlet's site to get the in-depth information and gratify their need.

But there is one study by Chiou & Tucker (2017) which elaborates different user behaviour in the light of Associated Press (AP) content removal from the Google News platform in the United States. Their research shows that when AP's content was removed from Google

News, then its users did not shift to another major news aggregator, Yahoo News, to consume AP's content. When we see this result in the light of our research question one (RQ1), it indicates two hypotheses.

**Hypothesis-5:** In the absence of AP content, users of aggregator Google News were still able to gratify all their all needs from there, so they didn't bother to switch to another aggregator Yahoo News to gratify their different needs.

**Hypothesis-6:** Users have no idea about AP content removal from Google News platform and they were not able to recognize the drop in the quality and diversity of the content in the absence of AP stories.

This study is significant because it deals with the two largest players of news dissemination media in the United States. In this study, Chiou & Tucker (2017) identified two theoretical effects of aggregators, Scanning effect and Traffic effect. Scanning effect can be described as when user scans the content of aggregator but don't bother to click on related link to get in-depth information about respective content. Traffic effect implies when users want to get in-depth or new information by utilizing a platform's content.

Statistics of their research showed that overall traffic to Google News and Yahoo News remained same in the test period which implies that there is no scanning effect when quality of content was reduced in the absence of AP stories on Google's platform. So, this study tries to analyze these observations in the light of hypothesis-5 and hypothesis-6.

**Case-1:** When we apply hypothesis-5 of this study, it reflects that Google News users were able to gratify all their needs in absence of AP content and didn't switch to Yahoo News. It also indicates that Google News users are loyal to this platform and due to value added other services from Google such as Google mail etc., users were reluctant to switch side and preferred to stay on Google's platform. But what was the precise reason for the Google News users to stay on that platform after removal of AP content, it needs to be explored further. The study of Chiou & Tucker (2017) only describes that removal of AP content decreased the traffic to 28% for related websites, which was coming from Google News platform.

**Case-2:** In view of hypothesis-6, which says that Google News users had no idea about the removal of AP content and they failed to recognize a drop in the quality of content, it needs to be seen comprehensively in respect of total media penetration of United States. As news aggregators are only a small part of available media outlets to users, it can be assumed that Google News users must be consuming news from other traditional media outlets too such as Television, Newspapers etc. Since AP is very old and distinguished news outlet and Google News is one of the prominent news aggregators, so when a dispute erupted between these two media giants in January 2010 due to licensing issues and Google News removed all AP contents from its platform, it must had been reported in traditional news outlets. It indicates that people who were using Google News were likely to be aware of AP content drop issue and had an idea that they were not getting AP stories on Google platform which may be

useful to gratify their certain needs. So, hypothesis-6 doesn't seem to work here as users were likely to be aware of AP content removal issue. Therefore, it's interesting to see that Google News users decided to stay with it and didn't move to Yahoo News. Results indicate that they also consumed less news through Google News platform (Traffic to related sites decreased by 28% due to AP content removal). In light of this, further studies may explore reasons why Google News users behave in such a loyal way to this aggregator's platform.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this study show that news consumers on online aggregator's platform are active and they consume the content as per their needs and desires. People of different age group prefers different aggregator's platform. Yahoo News' user are older compared to Google News and Huffington Post's users. Similarly, younger people prefer surfing Huffington Post compared to Yahoo and Google News. People tend to visit online news aggregator's platform due to different motivations which can be information, social or entertainment motivations. Also, people visit aggregator's platform only to consume news, not opinions.

News outlets compete with each other on aggregator's platform to grab more user attention and this competition leads to quality content generation among news outlets. This process makes a positive impact on users as well as on the society. At the same time, display of the content on aggregator's platform plays a major role in grabbing user attention and generating traffic to news outlet's website from the aggregator's platform. When the content on the aggregator's platform gratify the need of the news consumer, they don't tend to go to the news outlet's platform. But when content does not satisfy their information need, they visit the content creator's site to gratify it. Also, loyalty of news consumers' needs to be studied further as removal of Associated Press content from Google New's platform did not shift its user to the platform of Yahoo News in search of more vivid content.

## **Limitations and future scope of study**

This study is based on the secondary research and qualitative analysis of the research papers obtained by adopting research methodology of the study. To get a more clear and precise results, a quantitative research can be planned taking uses and gratification paradigm. Also, as discussed in Hypothesis-5 and Hypothesis-6, further study is required to explore why Google News users behaved in such a loyal manner to its platform and did not move to Yahoo's platform to get AP's story. The user feedback can throw some light on this phenomenon.

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## GENDER PORTRAYALS IN INDIAN TV ADVERTISEMENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEPTION OF YOUTH IN ROHTAK

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### Abstract

*In today's dynamic environment, mass media, especially advertisements, significantly shape perceptions about product appeal and societal norms, notably gender roles. Gender distinctions, vital in defining societal roles, also perpetuate entrenched stereotypes (Dominelli, 2007, p. 29). A study at Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, titled "Gender Portrayals in Indian TV Advertisements: Understanding the Perception of Youth in Rohtak," examined young adults' perspectives (20-25 years) on these portrayals. The findings highlighted a mix of traditional and evolving gender representations. While many ads upheld traditional roles, others showcased diverse female roles. Respondents favored conventional roles but stressed ads should be convincing, brief, informative, and respectful. The study underscores a need for more authentic and inclusive advertising, aligning with modern perspectives on gender equality.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Television, Youth, Advertisements.

### I. Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, numerous resources cater to mankind, with mass media being notably pervasive. Clarke (1992) highlights how various media forms, like television, radio, and magazines, shape people's perceptions. Advertisements, a significant aspect of this media, subtly reinforce societal beliefs about gender and race (McLaughlin & Goulet, 1999). Gender profoundly influences modern advertising, encapsulating societal views on masculinity, femininity, and their associated stereotypes (Dominelli, 2007, p. 29). While traditional Indian roles depict men as providers and women as homemakers, evolving movements challenge and redefine these stereotypes. Yet, advertisements often lag, perpetuating dated gender roles rather than reflecting contemporary achievements of women. Kotler and Keller (2008) define advertising as a sponsored non-personal promotion, but the industry frequently defaults to traditional gender norms for clarity (Kim & Lory, 2005). Notably, men dominate ad narratives, side-lining women to glamorous roles in India's advertising landscape, overlooking their intellectual contributions. Early studies, like Bardwick and Schumann (1967), observed this skewed portrayal, with women often confined to domestic settings. Men are supposed to be the main attraction in maximum advertisements - their concern, their actions, their accomplishment, their woes, where the significance of the women are marginalized (Schaffter, 2006, p. 50). The women are confined to the glamorous role in Indian advertisement industry. The Indian advertisements rarely see a woman as intellectual, self-assured, independent and productively undertaking the responsibilities and contributing efficiently in society. Rather the women are seen as the objects – beautiful objects for the eyes with full concentration on their body and body parts. In India though the



gender roles are getting little bit relaxed in household chores, many roles still remain firm (Jananpathy, 2002, p. 227). Bardwick and Schumann (1967) in one of the earliest studies on gender role portrayals in television advertisements found that in comparison to men women appeared mostly inside the home and as housewives in television advertisements. For the marketing of the beauty products, most of the advertisement companies use glamour, women in the sense to attract attention of a men or looking beautiful to please men. The women audiences have an influence of these advertisements. In some advertisement women are shown to be housewives in a role of caretaker and home cantered work etc. Consequently, the Indian government introduced measures, such as the 'Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act,' aiming to regulate and prevent negative gender portrayals in media (Joshua, 2013).

## **II. Rationale**

The depiction of women in media, particularly advertisements, has been a longstanding subject of academic inquiry and public discourse. This proposed study aims to scrutinize the patterns and trends in how women are portrayed in Indian television commercials and gauge the youth's perceptions of these depictions. It's crucial to assess female representation in media, given the historical invisibility and often skewed portrayal of women. Numerous studies, including those by Courtney and Lokeretz (1971), Dominick and Rauch (1972), and Hassim (2006), emphasize the media's tendency to misrepresent women, perpetuating both positive and negative stereotypes. Therefore, understanding the media's role in shaping these images and discerning young people's perceptions becomes imperative.

Television stands as a pivotal medium for mass communication, fostering awareness, knowledge dissemination, and behavioral change. This study zeroes in on advertisements due to their persuasive nature and significant influence in molding consumer behavior and attitudes. Despite advancements, gender disparities persist in ads, often relegating women to secondary roles or using them merely as product endorsers, reflecting underlying gender inequalities.

Using a structured questionnaire, this research aims to explore the youth's perceptions, particularly those aged 20-25, about women's portrayal in Indian TV advertisements. Additionally, the study seeks insights into the cultivation theory of mass communication, exploring how media's repetitive portrayals shape societal perceptions and norms over time.

## **III. Theoretical Framework**

Advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping societal views on gender roles, and historically, Indian ads have often reinforced outdated stereotypes about women. These depictions frequently relegated women to domestic spheres, highlighting their subservience and reducing them to mere physical attributes, mirroring entrenched patriarchal values.

The influx of Western influences in the 1990s, post-economic liberalization, brought both Western beauty standards and progressive advertising concepts to India. Brands like Nike and Dove spearheaded messages of inclusivity and female empowerment, striking a chord with

the Indian populace. As we moved into the 21st century, feminist narratives began influencing Indian advertising, challenging prevailing biases. Initiatives like the "Dark is Beautiful" campaign tackled colorism head-on, advocating for a spectrum of beauty standards. Meanwhile, Ariel's #ShareTheLoad emphasized household gender equality, urging men to partake in domestic chores.

Today's Indian advertising landscape is evolving. Leading brands are portraying women beyond traditional roles, spotlighting them as professionals and trailblazers. Examples include Unilever's "Kan Khajura Tesan," which highlighted women's decision-making roles, and Star Plus's "Nayi Soch," lauding female cricketers.

However, hurdles remain. Instances like Fair & Lovely's branding overhaul and Manforce Condoms' contentious ads spotlight persistent biases and objectification. To genuinely advance gender equity, brands must prioritize authenticity, address internal biases, and ardently advocate for inclusivity, steering India toward a more egalitarian cultural paradigm.

- Pavani et al. (2017) explored the portrayal of women in Indian television ads, focusing on how these influences adolescent girls' purchasing decisions. Their findings revealed that advertisements depicting women primarily as beauty symbols significantly influenced these choices.
- Fatma (2016) scrutinized the evolving portrayal of women in television commercials, noting that these portrayals often adhere to male-dominated ideologies, confining women to traditional household roles.
- Nath (2016) delved into the efficacy and drawbacks of using sex appeal in advertisements. He discovered that excessive sexual content could backfire, emphasizing the need for marketers to judiciously incorporate such elements based on product context.
- Sasirekha et al. (2020) analyzed the portrayal of women's body image in magazine ads, noting that models typically showcased were young, attractive, and slender, potentially influencing readers' self-perception and aspirations.
- Kumari and Shivani (2015) evaluated women's representation in Indian media advertisements, observing a predominant portrayal of women as homemakers endorsing household products, often utilizing young models for brand promotions.
- Eisend (2022) assessed the portrayal of older individuals in advertising, revealing mixed reactions. He emphasized the need for advertisers to consider societal implications, particularly ageism, in their campaigns.
- Chatley (2018) explored women's roles in Indian advertisements, noting evolving representations yet highlighting persistent depictions of women balancing multiple roles while primarily attending to domestic responsibilities.
- Kumar (2017) investigated perceptions of overt sexualization in ads, noting its potential to attract consumers but also its risks in creating negative brand associations.
- Sharma and Bumb (2021) examined gender differences in perceptions of women's roles in advertising, concluding that varied viewpoints exist among Indian men and women, impacting purchasing intentions.

- Das and Sharma (2017) studied young adults' perceptions of women in Indian TV ads, revealing that while some portrayals aligned with cultural norms, scantily clad depictions did not foster lasting brand loyalty.
- Soni (2020) probed the societal impact of advertisements on women's self-perception. Her research highlighted the pressure women feel to conform to specific physical ideals propagated in commercials, which negatively impacts self-esteem and contributes to issues like eating disorders, especially among young females.

#### **IV. Research Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, will be employed during the data collection phase. Quantitative research aids in gathering statistically measurable data, while qualitative methods facilitate capturing the perceptions of the youth effectively. Content Analysis is defined as a systematic examination of the content within communication, focusing on meanings, contexts, and intentions embedded in messages. Positioned at the intersection of observation and document analysis, content analysis serves as a methodological approach where the content produced by individuals is examined and analyzed. This method is often viewed as an unobtrusive or non-reactive form of social research, as it analyzes pre-existing communications rather than eliciting direct responses from individuals (Kerlinger, 1973). Berelson (1952) further elucidates content analysis as a technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative evaluation of the explicit content within communication. For this study, a content analysis tool will be utilized to extract qualitative insights, while a semi-structured questionnaire will be employed to gather quantitative data.

#### **Locale of the study**

The descriptive study was conducted in Haryana. The locale of the research is Rohtak, Haryana at Maharishi Dayanand University (MDU) with (Post graduation students). According to the Census of India (2011), Haryana is the state with lowest female Sex Ratio; 861 (female per thousand male). Haryana is the state in which the patriarchy system is strictly followed and the youth have been selected for the study as it will be interesting to explore their perception about the Indian TV commercial advertisements, living and being up brought in the same environment. The research will be conducted in two phases:

**Phase-I** Two leading private general entertainment channels (GECs) were chosen based on their high TRP ratings. The study observed advertisements aired during prime time, specifically from 8 to 9 pm. These advertisements were meticulously watched, categorized, recorded, and systematically coded. Utilizing predetermined categories such as status, role/traits, setting credibility, voice-over, eye contact, and product category, each advertisement was coded for analysis. The research then delved into the frequency of these variables, exploring associations among the categories using appropriate statistical methods. Among all the advertisements viewed, the ten most frequently aired ones were prioritized. This phase primarily emphasized a content analysis of these selected advertisements.

**Phase-II** The study's second phase will engage a sample of 60 participants aged between 20 and 25 years. Participants will be sourced from Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, using a non-probability purposive sampling method. Among the six advertisements chosen for this phase, three will portray stereotypical roles of women, while the remaining three will depict non-stereotypical roles. These advertisements will be presented to the selected participants. Alongside basic demographic inquiries, respondents will answer questions addressing the varied roles women assume in TV advertisements. The findings from the semi-structured questionnaire will be organized systematically to evaluate the collective perceptions of the audience. Additionally, it will highlight any discernible differences in perceptions based on gender and age concerning the representation of women in Indian TV commercials.

### Sample and Sampling Techniques

#### Sample

**Phase-1:** For content analysis of the advertisements, ten advertisements are selected. The advertisements will be selected on the basis on their repetition during the prime time (8-9pm).

- Inclusion criteria: TV channels with the highest TRP. And the Advertisements shown in prime time (8-9pm)
- Exclusion criteria: TV channels with low TRP. And the Advertisements shown in time slot then than prime time.

**Phase-II:** To capture a diverse range of perspectives from respondents, a semi-structured questionnaire will serve as the primary research instrument. A survey involving 60 participants will be conducted using purposive sampling techniques. This sample will comprise an equal distribution of genders, with 30 young males and 30 young females from Maharishi Dayanand University. The selection criteria target individuals aged 20-25 who are either pursuing or have completed their master's degrees. These chosen respondents will be presented with six specific advertisements for evaluation.

**Inclusion Criteria:** The focus is on post-graduate students from Maharishi Dayanand University. Given their advanced educational background, post-graduate students are presumed to possess a deeper understanding of the nuances surrounding women's portrayal in advertising. Their academic exposure enables them to critically analyze and articulate perceptions about these advertisements more comprehensively and insightfully.

**Exclusion Criteria:** Undergraduate students are excluded from this study due to their comparatively limited knowledge base when juxtaposed with their post-graduate counterparts.

### Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling will guide our data collection approach. This non-probability sampling method allows for the deliberate selection of specific participants based on known attributes

or characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. Unlike random sampling, where participants are chosen by chance, in purposive sampling, researchers possess prior knowledge about the sample, ensuring alignment with the study's goals. This method is favored for its precision, offering more targeted and relevant insights. As Dane (1990) aptly states, "Purposive sampling's strength lies in its ability to pinpoint individuals or events that are pivotal to the study's core objectives."

### **Data collection**

Advertisements will be watched in the prime time during the period of one week out of which most repeated ten advertisements will be selected for the content analysis. Six advertisements will be chosen and then these advertisements will be shown to the respondents to know their perception towards the portrayal of women in Indian television advertisements.

## **V. Results and discussions**

### **Findings and discussions: Phase-I**

The qualitative assessment examines advertisements, assessing both stereotypical and non-stereotypical portrayals. Those receiving higher TRP ratings naturally receive extended airtime. Given that these ads reach audiences across age groups, it's crucial they avoid depicting women in ways that could negatively influence society. Among the ten most frequently aired advertisements studied, six presented stereotypical portrayals, often casting women in domestic roles. In contrast, two ads showcased women in diverse roles outside traditional domestic settings. This disparity underscores evolving societal attitudes; as perceptions shift over time, advertisers are increasingly crafting non-stereotypical content that resonates more authentically with viewers.

### **Phase-II**

Respondents predominantly watch television for over an hour, favoring entertainment channels, particularly music and dance genres. FMCG product advertisements attract most viewers, with females gravitating towards beauty products like soaps and creams, while males lean towards durable goods like mobiles and bikes. A significant 60% of female respondents perceive advertisements as informative about new products. Interestingly, 13% of males and 10% of females believe these ads offer valuable insights for decision-making.

Regarding gender portrayal, a striking 95% of respondents recognize women as central figures in FMCG ads. Some also note women's prominence in ads for durables like mixers and purifiers. While 43% of males endorse traditional roles for women, emphasizing their perceived perfection in such roles, 33% of females stress the importance of gender equality. However, a similar fraction of females see no issue with women's portrayal in traditional roles. A majority across genders (57% males and 53% females) appreciate women's representation in ads for boosting product sales and setting examples. Yet, concerns arise over negative depictions causing societal embarrassment. Respondents value advertisements that are concise, persuasive, informative, and culturally resonant.

## VI. Conclusion

Television remains an omnipresent force in our lives, reaching an astounding 96.5% of the population with 183 million households owning a television set (BARC 2015). Recognized as a premier platform for targeted advertising, television's unique ability to simultaneously engage a vast audience has made it a preferred medium for marketing experts. Despite the higher costs associated with television commercials, their strategic placement during prime programming ensures their efficacy in conveying specific sales pitches to viewers. However, the repetitive nature of these advertisements, though monotonous to adults, leaves an enduring impact on impressionable young minds.

The portrayal of women in media, particularly in advertisements, has sparked extensive research and debate. Such portrayal is crucial as media often perpetuates skewed images of women, either through invisibility or negative representation (Courtney and Lokeretz 1971, Dominick and Rauch 1972, Ferrante et al. 1988, among others). Consequently, understanding youth perceptions regarding these portrayals becomes imperative, given media's profound influence on societal norms and gender roles.

Mass communication via television not only fosters awareness but also shapes behavior and perceptions. Advertisements, being persuasive and captivating, significantly influence attitudes toward products, services, and societal norms. A concerning trend emerges when analyzing gender representation in commercials. While both genders appear in ads, men often dominate roles of authority and leadership, while women frequently find themselves confined to domestic settings, perpetuating age-old stereotypes. To probe deeper into these perceptions, a study was undertaken focusing on youth aged 20-25. This research sought to gauge their reactions to women's portrayals in Indian TV ads, considering both stereotypical and non-stereotypical content. While some advertisements showcased progressive images, others clung to traditional gender roles, predominantly portraying women as homemakers. This dichotomy underscores the lingering societal adherence to age-old gender norms.

Interestingly, respondents exhibited a blend of traditional values and contemporary expectations. While many felt comfortable with women in traditional roles, there was a palpable openness to more diverse and realistic portrayals. Respondents emphasized the importance of advertisements being informative, concise, and relatable, advocating for authentic depictions rooted in real-life experiences. Thus, while many viewers express satisfaction with current gender portrayals, there's a growing consensus for more balanced and inclusive representations.

In conclusion, while television advertising remains a potent influencer, it also holds a mirror to society's evolving perceptions of gender. As brands navigate this landscape, striking a balance between tradition and progress becomes paramount. Authenticity, inclusivity, and a nuanced understanding of diverse audience sentiments will be crucial in shaping a more equitable and reflective advertising ecosystem.



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## CAN SMART EDUCATION ADDRESS THE KNOWLEDGE GAP IN INDIA? AN OPINION

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### Abstract

*The opinion paper explores the dimensions of smart education post the advent of National Education Policy of 2020 in India and aims to understand how the problem of knowledge gap can be addressed through the integration of digital technologies in higher education. The paper explores the different aspects of NEP 2020 and its blueprint for integration of digital technologies and to what extent they address the concerns of the knowledge gap theory in context of India.*

**Keywords:** Smart Education, Knowledge Gap, Adaptive Learning, Digital Divide

### I. Concern of Knowledge

In the 1970s, Philip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien (Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor, 1970, pp. 159-17) proposed the “Knowledge Gap Theory”. The theory highlighted the existence of an information gap within society that is shaped due to socio-economic factors. The fundamental aspect of the theory was that in a society the existing social systems create a hierarchy of classes on the basis of which accessibility is defined. In this process when mass media is included as a variable then the information gap increases further as those positioned higher in the overall hierarchy are able to acquire more information in comparison with the rest. As a result, the knowledge gap between these classes increases (Communication Theory, 2019). Since Media Dependence Theory has highlighted that in a society individual would gradually rely more and more on media for information, the classification of information accessibility on the basis of socio-economic hierarchy ultimately leads to a vicious gap in knowledge creation which can only be addressed through an equilibrium. Since ensuring an equilibrium from a long-term perspective can be a herculean task as the concerned variables such as money, information, class, etc. may not remain constant, the problem of the knowledge gap has to be addressed through some form of technological innovation that allows the space for inclusivity and can leap-frog the structural hurdles for the creation of a sound knowledge system.

Atkin and Jeffers (2017) regarding the knowledge gap have highlighted that the socio-economic factors have been dictating the accessibility of information through technologies and the inclusive accessibility to technologies has been a trickle-down process in society. In other words, there has always been a gap (or a phase of gestation) where the technology has been accessible across different classes. For instance, comparing the smartphone revolution

in India post-2010s, there has been a strong hierarchy in terms of the devices owned by different users that provided different degrees of freedom for engagement with information as well as utility. This very process has reflected a divide in knowledge formation across different classes. Though the gap has reduced with time, but it has not been considerable due to the existence of a hierarchy in accessibility to technologies. The other criticism regarding the knowledge gap has been that it can never be filled as the factors involved in defining the gap can never be fixed and may change over time. Thus addressing the given set of factors in the long run to limit the knowledge gap may itself create another information gap in society because of the changing factors impacting the already existing knowledge gap. Further, the Knowledge Gap theory holds significant importance in the context of India's rapid digitization in the 21st century because digitization has expanded the options for knowledge creation among the populace. However, a fundamental drawback of this phenomenon is the potential for an unequal distribution of knowledge across socio-economic groups due to the increasing freedom of choice in accessing information. Such disparity may lead to adverse long-term societal consequences. Thus, policymakers are tasked with ensuring equitable knowledge formation among the country's demographic dividend. However, in India, existing structural inequalities and unequal access to media technologies have exacerbated the knowledge gap among different segments of the population (Sheikh, 2017). As a result, there is a dire need to explore the domains of knowledge creation and dissemination but with an unconventional and different approach that can ultimately provide inclusivity in accessibility and engagement.

## **II. The Indian Smart Education Approach**

The Smart Education approach in India has witnessed different cycles of structural changes. Despite that, smart education has been an important step forward because more than 800,000 students have been enrolled in higher education from 2018 onwards, marking an increase in the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 27% (2020-21). However, there exists the issue of insufficiently recognized institutions that pose a challenge in absorbing the young population into higher education (Livemint, 2019). Apart from that, there is another significant problem of lack of effective industry-academia collaboration. Many courses offered by institutions have not been updated to meet evolving market demands and this has led to the curricula misalignment with industrial needs. Most of the central and state institutions are still relying heavily on grants from the University Grants Commission for sustenance. Self-funded colleges and institutions have no other option but to maintain high fee structures that restrict student admissions and compromise the long-term educational quality due to profit-driven models. Even research-based engagements are affected due to a lack of resources or funds or due to the growing rat race for showcasing advancement in pedagogy and innovation.

The advent of the National Education Policy (2020) has been a major step in enhancing the overall state of education in India. A notable aspect of the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 has been its focus on promoting education through indigenous languages, employing innovative methods like gamification and apps, as well as cultural exchanges through various mediums such as films, theatre, storytelling, poetry, and music. Additionally, the NEP aims

to encourage the learning of international languages like Korean, Spanish, French, and German. In the domain of higher education, NEP has identified key areas for growth, including offering interdisciplinary programs in local languages, promoting faculty and institutional autonomy, curriculum redesign, flexible exit options for students, establishing a National Research Foundation, and enhancing online and distance learning. In addition to that, NEP has strategically integrated online learning and ICT into higher education, facilitating industry-academia linkages. For instance, the Academic Bank of Credits, a provision under the NEP, digitally records students' academic credits from various institutions, allowing flexibility in course selection and credit transfer. It also promotes MOOCs and e-learning platforms like UGC-SWAYAM, where students can earn credits and enhance their digital skills. Moreover, the NEP encourages the development of digital libraries and the creation of a National Education Technology Forum to boost students' digital literacy. Also to enhance research and innovation, the NEP has advocated for integrating ICT into academic practices, given India's comparatively low research contribution. Institutions have been encouraged to develop digital infrastructure for optimal learning models and curriculum content. Accreditation through the National Accreditation Council grants institutions the freedom to develop online programs, exemplified by initiatives like IIM-B MOOCs.

Apart from that, the NEP-2020 also emphasizes the use of digital technologies for smart education which also focuses on integrating digital learning in a personalized manner so that different students from various cultural backgrounds can be integrated into this educational and participatory digital space. Further, most online learning platforms rely on open educational resources (OERs) and utilize the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) due to its cost-effectiveness and customizable content sharing and assessment features. However, SCORM provides a linear digital engagement experience and lacks adaptability in learning. For example, e-PG Pathshala (2015) uses SCORM exclusively for delivering learning material in text and video formats with self-assessment tasks (Hwang & Tsai, 2008).

An alternative model is the Modular Adaptive Learning System (MALS), which constructs online learning programs in a personalized and intelligent manner using algorithms. If learning objectives are not met, MALS generates new learning objects, course material, and assessments iteratively until objectives are achieved. While considered suitable for adaptive learning, MALS requires comprehensive digital infrastructure to operate effectively. The other models such as the "Wrap Around Model" and "Integrated Model" are also linear and utilize existing online materials, offering limited customization and dynamic assessment capabilities. The challenge in integrating ICT into education under the NEP (2020) lies in incorporating dynamic e-learning models that cater to users' adaptive learning experiences. Many government-run e-learning platforms, like Google Course Builder, remain linear rather than dynamic, lacking the ability to adjust learning processes based on individual achievements and objectives (Chauhan, 2017). Additionally, copyright restrictions limit

access to adaptive learning models, necessitating public-private partnerships to develop alternative e-learning models.

### III. Problem Solved?

The problem remains partially addressed because of certain limitations. By comparing India's National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 with its global counterparts reveals differing ideological approaches to the education policy. In many global contexts, education policies align with neoliberal ideologies, particularly in higher education, emphasizing competition, entrepreneurship, and neo-conservatism. For example, China's education policy operates on a 3-tier system, focusing on mobility, foreign recruitment, and internationalization. It stresses innovation-driven development over technology-driven progress, utilizing digital educational resources to enhance teaching and learning. In contrast, India emphasizes entrepreneurial skills, competitiveness, and employability, with NEP-2020 underlining the significance of local and Indian languages in higher education. Similarly, Singapore places a high value on holistic education, exposing students to best practices in higher education and conducting internal assessments of institutions to complement the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER). India's new policy aims to restructure accreditation and ranking systems to categorize institutions offering value-added courses, both online and offline. Conversely, countries like the USA, Japan, and Canada prioritize infrastructure development, pedagogical excellence, and industry-academia collaboration despite promoting competition in education policy. They have successfully integrated ICT into higher education, fostering effective adaptive learning models based on universalism and ultra-relativism. Consequently, they have attracted considerable talent migration due to educational and professional opportunities. While India's NEP initiates internationalization efforts, its approach to ICT integration reflects a blended approach across different higher education programs, as opposed to the more advanced models seen in other global leaders.

The other principal challenge is the integration of ICT into education through the NEP (2020) where there is a need to emphasize on the incorporation of various dynamic e-learning models that cater to users' adaptive learning experiences. Most government-run e-learning platforms still rely on open-source applications like Google Course Builder, which offers a linear engagement format rather than dynamic ones. Adaptive learning entails dynamically adjusting the learning process with changes in objectives. However, current courses progress in a time-bound manner rather than responding to learners' achievements and goals (Chauhan, 2017). Additionally, course designers must manually adjust programs to meet individual learning needs, which becomes cumbersome with a large number of learners. Furthermore, assessment lacks flexibility, as many adaptive learning models are copyrighted and not readily available through open-source licenses. Hence, the policy should outline how public-private partnerships can develop alternative e-learning models. Another drawback of the policy regarding e-learning and industry-academia linkages is its failure to emphasize contemporary cloud-computing-based learning models for dynamic user engagement. Additionally, the policy overlooks the "Sand-Castle Principle," crucial for shaping India's online learning systems around adaptive learning models. There is also concern about how to



strategically invest resources in building platforms and training instructors across geographically diverse institutions in India. Moreover, the policy should highlight how adaptive learning models can enhance and update online content for future use, rather than being repetitive.

Under the NEP-2020, institutions in India with higher accreditation from NAAC have the opportunity to develop their in-house e-learning models for undergraduate and postgraduate programs. This initiative is seen as positive, as smaller institutions are collaborating with larger ones to leverage infrastructure, applications, and expertise, fostering alternative partnerships between institutions. Additionally, higher education institutions are exploring open-source applications and adapting them to offer adaptive learning experiences. While the Modular Adaptive Learning System (MALS) is considered the most desirable model in India, its costliness limits its availability across many institutions. Nevertheless, some institutions in science and management domains have partnered with private stakeholders to develop online course models, sometimes charging subscription fees for popular specializations. Collaborations for cross-platforming exist, but adaptive learning experiences are currently limited to specific attributes. NEP-2020 has also encouraged the growth of the market for alternative learning platforms by private players, offering cost-effective solutions. However, these applications, compared to global counterparts like Coursera, Skillshare, and Moodle, have restricted features due to copyright limitations, limiting their ability to provide similar experiences. Nonetheless, the market for alternative platforms is gaining attention, fostering collaboration for the development of in-house applications for online course delivery.

If there can be an integrated participatory space between the public and the private in terms of smart education and the policy in the later years provides a blueprint regarding the collaboration between different stakeholders, it will not only enhance adaptive learning models for digital education but will also help in addressing the problems of accessibility and greatly reducing the problem of knowledge gap, especially in the case of India.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The discourse on the Knowledge Gap Theory, alongside the examination of India's Smart Education approach and the implications of the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, underscores the persistent challenges in addressing socio-economic disparities and ensuring equitable knowledge formation. While the NEP introduces commendable initiatives to integrate ICT into education and foster adaptive learning models, it faces hurdles in achieving dynamic engagement and overcoming copyright restrictions. Disparities in institutional recognition, industry-academia collaboration, and resource allocation further hinder progress. However, the potential for public-private partnerships and the development of alternative e-learning platforms offer avenues for improvement. For India to effectively bridge the knowledge gap and promote inclusive education, a concerted effort involving diverse stakeholders and a strategic focus on dynamic e-learning models are imperative. Only through such collaborative measures can the nation harness the full potential of smart



education to mitigate socio-economic disparities and foster a more equitable knowledge ecosystem.

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