

A Critical Analysis of Socio-Cultural Impact of New Media on Users in India

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Abstract

Media are one of the factors of social change. New media have generated debate regarding its influence on society and culture. The history of media studies has shown how communication researchers evolved theories of media effects on the basis of their studies involving print, radio and tv and helped improve the understanding of social impact of media raising critical issues of media access and its impact on social institutions. Based on a survey of 801 users of Internet and mobile phones, this study analyzes media habits and social cultural impact on the behaviour and attitude. This is a study conducted in the State of Karnataka, regarded as the IT bowl of India. The study of media exposure shows significant results. There is significant relationship between the age of the respondents and the use of computers. It may be inferred that using computers varies from one age group to another. Further, there is no significant relationship between the age of the respondents and the use of mobile phones. There is no significant relationship between the gender and the surfing of internet. However, there is significant relationship between the level of education and the surfing of internet. Access to internet varies with one's economic background. Income does influence the exposure to internet. There is significant relationship between exposure to print and broadcast media and surfing of internet.

The socio-cultural impact of internet reveals that internet has made difference in the lives of the users ($t=17.56$) with regard to language and increase in the level of knowledge. However, the respondents feel that internet has not influenced the behavior, physical appearance and dressing style. Internet has not reduced the social contacts with friends and relatives say the study. Contrary to popular belief internet has not affected the reading habits of the people. Exposure to internet has also not affected the people's access to traditional media like radio and television. Respondents claim that these new media have not made people less hard working and has not come in the way of professional duties and are not a cause for depression, frustration and loneliness. However, the study shows that lack of computer literacy develops inferiority complex among people and people also view internet as a symbol of modernity and they felt connected to the world.

Key terms: New media, Internet, Mobile Phone, Culture, Social network, Social change, Attitude.

Introduction

According to the World Internet Project International Report 2012, countries like Australia, Canada, Colombia, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom are reported to have more than 80% of heavy Internet penetration. Comparatively India is still lagging behind with 13% of Internet users which is abysmally low.

India has 898 million mobile phone users and 292 million of them are living in rural areas. Mobile signals reach 77 % of the geographical area. An estimated 121 million people including 24 million in rural areas use internet in India. With the increase in mobile users every fraction of a minute, it is believed that mobile phones will expand the growth of internet. India is poised to exploit the benefits of media convergence. No mobile industry can afford to ignore India's 400 million young population which is perhaps more than the population of USA. India is also busy networking its over 800 universities and 24000 colleges through Optical Fibre Cable to improve quality of education and increase employability of its youth by providing access to Internet.

Mobile phones are becoming cheaper and have incredible multiple media features ever seen in the history of communication technology. Mobile computing will bring internet much more accessible and affordable in India in the coming days. Today only 2% of rural areas in India have access to internet underlining the hurdle of digital divide that every development initiative has to encounter. Nevertheless, many studies related to the impact of internet have highlighted certain significant trends which indicate that the Internet use is gradually expanding and preference for online news is showing an upward trend even in cities with low Internet penetration in India (Bamezai et al, 2011).

Obviously, the researchers in India are showing keen interest in studying the way people use these new media for education, business and entertainment. Researchers are interested in understanding how Indians are using internet for more than just checking their email and how new media are enriching the lives of people besides studying access and reach of internet. Therefore a study was undertaken using survey research method to analyze the social and cultural implications of new media in India.

Eighties marked the arrival of interactive technologies paving way for the advent of personalized media that led to convergence of divergent tools of communication. The rapid expansion of new media industry has caused paradigm shift in the process of communication posing challenges to social scientists and technologists. The term 'new media' is believed to be the creation of new media industry (Backlund and Sandberg, 2002) to distinguish itself from the conventional media industry of print and broadcast. Internet is described as a 'meta-medium: a set of layered services that make it easy to construct new media with almost any properties one likes' (Agre P. 1998a). New media are computer based media that encompass 'channels and platforms for producing, disseminating, displaying, and storing information and entertainment that rely on digital communication technologies' (Wei, 2008a). "Internet" is referred to "the electronic network of networks that links people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval" (DiMaggio et al, 2001). New media is complex to define as it means different things to different people. What is new about new media and why it is called new? It may be the access, functions, non-linear process and freedom to own and use media at one's convenience, interests and needs that makes these media different from print and broadcast. New media has ushered in new ways of producing, sharing, distribution and marketing of information products in a most decentralized

manner ever imagined in the history of technological revolution. Further, new media have reinvented old or traditional media like print, radio and TV and have the potential to integrate a bouquet of media.

New media devices continue to increase but primarily consists of internet, mobile phones, E-mail, computer, laptop, tablets, iPad, social networks, blogs, multimedia, integrated media like radio, TV and internet and mobile phones, video phone, wireless communication devices from phones to internet and all satellite based and cable communication devices. Technically, print, broadcast/radio and television no longer exists as independent entities as technology has changed their identity. Ironically, it is the turn of all the three traditional media to feel apprehensive about the presence and impact of new media. The traditional media having worked in isolation all these years have suddenly realized the importance of bonding. After surveying 200 newspaper publishers worldwide, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) found, "despite a somewhat gloomy outlook for wholesale convergence in media companies worldwide in the near term, convergence is already being implemented with varying degrees of enthusiasm and speed among the world's media companies" (Stone, 2001 quoted by Huang et.al). The nerve centre of new media basically is the integration of Internet, telecommunications and satellite communication. New media is being dictated by the letter 'G', the generation of mobile technology with 3G or 4G mobile phones harping on the speed of mobile network. Mobile internet is one of the milestones in the history of communication technology having ramification on telecommunication and broadcast policies. According to the latest survey by Netcraft, there are over 582 million (2012) websites in the world which has recorded a considerable increase from 255 million (2011) and a billion new pages are added every day (Netcraft 2012). Comparatively web media was adopted by users much faster than any other media of print, broadcast or film in the history (Arens, 2001). It took radio over 30 years to reach 50 million users whereas the Internet reached the same size audience in less than five years (Kerschbaumer 2001).

Media are one of the factors of social change. New media has generated debate regarding its influence on society and culture. Technological determinists suggest that structural features of new media induce social change by enabling new forms of communication and cultivating distinctive skills and sensibilities (McLuhan 1967, Eisenstein 1979 as cited by DiMaggio et al, 2001). The history of media has seen the scholars debating this issue with emergence of every new medium from newspaper to Internet. No new media study therefore can ignore one of earliest thesis on new media by Ron Rice who interpreted new media beyond technological perspective and perceived them as aspects effecting multilayered relationships among economic, political, behavioural, cultural and institutional as well as technological phenomena (Rice, 1984). Researchers (Dutton, 1996; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002; Lin & Atkin,2002;Rice,1984-Quoted by Wei R,2009)say that the history of communication technology is basically a history of social change, often in unpredictable ways under the influence of socio-political forces and technological innovations. Many researchers have studied the Internet's implications for social change throwing insight into the social consequences of Internet but they are limited to peripheral issues. There is need for social scientists to understand the social, cultural, economical and political influences of new media.

Literature Review

There are not many empirical studies that have examined the social and cultural impact of new media on Indian society. Further there are very few studies on how young generation which has grown with new media technology perceives and uses these media.

Many studies on Internet have revealed that 'Internet tends to complement rather than existing media and patterns of behavior' (DiMaggio et al, 2001). Daniel Bell perhaps was one of the earliest scholars to predict about the policy dilemmas due to the complex implications of the new media technology on print and electronic media. Daniel Bell termed the social organization of the new 'communications technology' the most central issue for the postindustrial society' (DiMaggio et al, 2001). Further, DiMaggio and others cite Manuel Castells's study on how Internet in its formative period poised to reorganize the social order; 'the Internet's integration of print, oral, and audiovisual modalities into a single system promises an impact on society comparable to that of the alphabet, creating new forms of identity and inequality, submerging power in decentered flows, and establishing new forms of social organization' (DiMaggio et al, 2001).

The history of media studies has shown how communication researchers evolved theories of media effects on the basis of their studies involving print, radio and tv and helped improve the understanding of social impact of media raising critical issues of media access and its impact on social institutions. The multifaceted mega medium like Internet has become the central concern of many studies focusing on how it is going to affect political institutions, economic policies, society, culture, art and entertainment media. Some studies on Internet users though found that heavier users experienced declines in socializing (Nie and Erbring 2000), a large number of studies revealed that Internet increases social ties (DiMaggio et al, 2001). Neuman and other authors quote 'longitudinal study by Kraut et al who found that Internet use increased interaction with family members and reported closeness to friends, especially for users whose perceived social support networks were strong before they began using the Internet' (DiMaggio et al, 2001). Internet access is crucial for effective participation of the society nevertheless scholars have lamented how the subject has suffered with the absence of meaningful research to build theories from sociological perspective. The importance of such studies cannot be undermined as scholars are of the opinion that 'sociology needs the Internet as a laboratory, policy makers need sociology to illuminate the collective choices that will shape the Internet's future. (DiMaggio et al, 2001). Culture and new media technology is one of the least researched topics by the researchers largely ignoring the theoretical concepts explaining the process of new media communication.

Studies confirm that Internet access is dependent on age, education and income variables. The digital divide, a technology and Internet access gap, is closely associated with education, income and age (Riffe, 2003). Regarding relationship between gender and internet use, one of the studies says that gender disparity is found in the width and depth of Internet use and online experiences. Significantly, the same study endorses the thesis that internet is also an opportunity for women not only to construct their identities, but also challenge certain traditional norms and modernize their lives. (Vijayalakshmi and Durga Bhavani, 2006). Nevertheless, a study (Patricia et al, 2001) that examined the attitudes and behaviours of undergraduate students with regard to the searching Internet for sexually explicit materials reveals that comparatively men were more likely to access these materials out of curiosity than women.

The study however claims that irrespective of gender, all students access Internet and e-mail in respect of the frequency of use or the place of logging on. Education is not a variable in the use of Internet shows a study. The education of college parents, the level of internet knowledge, and the motivation of traditional media based on uses and gratification has no effects on the using level of internet. (Fanbin Zeng, 2010).

A survey done by MTV, the popular music channel, across 31 cities in India among 5000 youngsters revealed that youth (34%) are influenced by social networks and are active users of features of mobile phones viz., camera (54%), send/ receive SMS (44%), Facebook mobile application (43%) and Internet websites (41%) underlining the popularity of mobile Internet among youth (Mint,2012). Text messaging has become the norm of communication among college students says a study (Daniel Ng, 2010) where irrespective of gender, majority of the youngsters express their desire to text messages because they believe that messaging keeps them socially active within their inner circle of influence and is vital for them to stay connected all the time.

Are social media credible? Social media have changed the relationships among people and their number has seen considerable increase. However, ‘millions of Americans though engage in social media every day, yet they believe that the vast majority of the information they find there has almost no credibility’ (Digital Report January 2012).

The premise that innovation adoption ‘in highly stratified societies will usually reinforce existing socioeconomic disparities’ (Norris, 2001) illustrate that adoption of Internet continues to be dependent on social and economic factors. A study conducted in China argues that the digital divide between Internet users and non users is increasing despite China being the market place for advanced digital media technologies. It attributes the digital divide to social and economic factors as majority of Internet users are more educated and come from economically sound social background endorsing the Knowledge gap theory (Quoted by Yang Xuerui, 2008) that development of mass communication can widen the gap in knowledge between different social groups instead of narrowing it.

As the penetration of Internet continues to increase in every social system, researchers have focused their studies in understanding the impact of Internet on social relationships.

Internet is also an opportunity for young people to create an identity of their own because of unbridled freedom and interactivity to the core. The young people of today who had exposure to technologies early in their school are presumed to be “more literate, creative, and socially skilled because of their familiarity with the Internet including trying out various aspects of their developing identity online” (Rice, 2001, Quoted by McMillan et al). Internet either offline or online is a tool of socialization establishes many a studies. According to Park, ‘wireless Internet use at school and hotspots is positively related to time spent with friends and acquaintances. Wireless Internet use is related to offline socializing in different contexts’. (Namsu,P 2010). Further, Internet use is used to augment rather than replace social interaction (Shields,N & Kane,J 2011). A longitudinal study by the the Digital Future Project of USC Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism that has been chronicling the influence of Influence of Internet and online Technology on American for almost a decade provides a insight into the behavioural pattern of Internet community. The report says that “through our 10 studies, we have observed one particularly fascinating constant: that online behavior changes relentlessly, and users and non-users develop attitudes and actions that are constantly in flux as technology emerges, and then thrives or withers” (The Digital Future Project 2011).

The research on the impact of Internet is riddled with contradictions. Some scholars predict the positive impact whereas others foresee negative influence on the society. One study revealed that web will simplify our life and change the very structure of our retailing and information gathering environment (Wright, Ertel and Mathews 1999 as quoted by Victoria and Faye W.Gilbert, 2002). Some other studies have found Internet to be harmful having evil

influence on the society and encourage unethical practices (Bush, Venable and Bush 2000, as quoted by Victoria and Faye W.Gilbert, 2002).

The World Internet Survey illustrates that use of Internet in countries like Australia, Canada, Colombia, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland and Spain witnesses somewhat greatly increased rather than decreased contact with the family. The same behavioural pattern repeats with regard to the contact with friends by the Internet users in these countries surveyed including Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom establishing the theory that Internet is a powerful tool of socialization with family and friends. Contrary to the misconception, the survey illustrates that 'Internet use does not necessarily take away from the time that users spend with their family'(World Internet Report 2012). That means to say that Internet usage behaviour is independent of family relations and friendship. Perhaps Internet users spend more time with their families than non users say the study establishing a premise that technological intervention is not overwhelming in socializing with family.

Review of studies reveal that research emphasis is more on understanding the new media, its history, characteristics, functions, structure and how people use them rather than on the process of communication. Obviously, there is need to study the social and cultural implications of new media to evolve theoretical framework to explain the diffusion of new media in the society. The users of new media are fragmented to the core. Understanding the audience is even more important for theories of social shaping (Livingstone, 1999).

Methodology

Survey method was found to be more appropriate to study the social and cultural impact of new media. Research tool consisted of a well designed questionnaire with 66 close ended questions in six categories. In the first part questions on socio- demographic and economic profile were designed. In the second part data was collected about media exposure. In the third part questions were designed to collect data about Internet access and its influence on society. In the fourth part 22 questions were designed to measure the socio- cultural impact of the Internet on the society. The fifth part consisted of 21 questions to measure access to Mobile Phones and its socio-cultural impact on the society. The last part consisted of questions aimed at measuring the overall influence of new media.

The sample consisted of 801 respondents spread over four districts across the State of Karnataka, considered as the IT bowl of India. The survey was conducted in selected cities of Bangalore- the silicon valley of India, Mysore- the cultural capital of the region, Dharwad- renowned for classical music, art and literature and Mangalore- the coastal belt and a vibrant trade centre. The sample consisted of employees of government and private sector and students of colleges. A random sample was selected on the basis of the enrollment register of the students in the colleges and employees working in Government and private institutions. The respondents in these lists were selected on the basis of their familiarity with the new media through simple random sampling. The study requires that the respondents shall be users of new media. Therefore, automatically non users in these lists were eliminated. Accordingly a sample of 801 respondents with 200 from each district was selected for the study.

Objectives;

1. To study the new media habits among users.
2. To examine the role of new media in changing the attitude and behavior of the users.
3. To analyze the relationship between socio demographic and economic variables and the use of new media.
4. To study how new media have influenced the users in respect of social behavior, information, knowledge and performance.
5. To examine the impact of new media on culture with regard to language, dress, values, beliefs.

Findings and Discussion

Profile of the Sample;

The sample of 801 respondents consisted of 56.1% males and 43.9% females. There were five categories of age ranging from 18-55>years. The sample consisted of 69.8% in the age of 18-24 years, 18.2% of 25-34 years, 5% of 35-44 years, 5.2% of 45-54 years and 1.7% of 55> years. Education of the respondents shows 52.3% graduates, 37.6% postgraduates and 6.2% high school and 3.9% school dropouts. Majority (56.8%) of them were students and 29.3% were employed in government and private sector where as 4.1% owned business. Most of them were Hindus (66.9%) while rest of them were minorities consisting of Christians (22.1%) and Muslims (9%). Income was categorized ranging from Rs.5000-30,000> that was broadly grouped into three income categories of High income (23.7%), middle income (32.3%) and low income (44%) groups.

INTERNET

New media habits

Media habits of the sample reveal access to mobile phones (74.9%), computers (58.9%), Internet at home (39%) and Internet at office/college (29.8%). Comparatively they have better access to traditional media viz., TV (88.4%), Newspaper (88.1%), Radio (63.4%) and Magazines (55.8%) than new media.

There is no significant relation between gender and surfing Internet ($\chi^2 = 0.35$; df: 1, NS; $p > 0.01$). Though males surf internet slightly more than females, the difference between the two is negligible. Further, there is no significant relationship between age and access to TV viewing, newspaper and magazine reading and mobile phone usage. However, there is significant relationship between age and access to computer ($\chi^2 = 15.92$; df: 4, $p < 0.05$) and Internet and radio listening ($\chi^2 = 15.76$; Df: 4, $p < 0.05$) as well. Access to computer ($\chi^2 = 30.70$; df:3, $p < 0.001$) and surfing Internet ($\chi^2 = 19.12$; df:3, $p < 0.001$) is dependent on the level of education. Access to these media is high among high educators. Higher the education greater the access to new media shows the study. However, TV viewing is independent of age and education ($\chi^2 = 1.63$; df: 3, NS; $p > 0.05$). People of all age groups and varied educational background watch TV. Having Internet at either at home ($\chi^2 = 37.63$; df: 3, $p < 0.001$) or office/college ($\chi^2 = 17.91$; df: 3, $p < 0.001$) is dependent on education. Highly educated have more access to Internet at home and office/college than those with low education.

Owning mobile phones ($\chi^2 = 38.73$; df:4, $p < 0.001$) and surfing Internet ($\chi^2 = 37.48$ df:4, $p < 0.001$) are dependent on one's family income. Surfing Internet either at home ($\chi^2 = 175.01$; df:4, $p < 0.001$) or office ($\chi^2 = 48.98$; df:4, $p < 0.001$) and owning computer ($\chi^2 = 101.54$; df:4, $p < 0.001$) invariably depends on the level of income. Digital divide is attributed

to economic factor. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 37.48$) reveals that there is a relation at 0.001 percent level of significance among the respondents regarding Internet surfing and income. People with high income surf Internet more than people with less income. The data signifies the relationship between family monthly income and Internet facility at home. There are 140 respondents of high income group (Rs.30, 000/- and above) having Internet connection compared to 27 respondents belonging to less income group (Rs. 5,000/- and less). It shows the affordability of computers and Internet connection at home by the respondents. The higher the income the greater the number of Internet connections at home. The digital divide owing to one's economic situation is creating inequalities in society. DiMaggio cites Norris findings that Internet is reproducing cross-national inequalities in use of newspapers, telephones, radio, and television because diffusion largely depends on economic development and research and development investments that are unequally distributed across societies (DiMaggio et al, 2001). It is a matter of concern that over 70.16% do not have access to Internet at office/college reflecting the need to develop infrastructure in government offices, colleges and private sector in order to support their employees or students in developing technology skills and improving their performance. This issue of inequality of access is more to do with the policy of government and its endeavours to reduce digital divide among disparate populations.

The study reveals that those who are exposed to traditional media like newspaper, magazine, Television and radio also log on to Internet. The chi-square values ($\chi^2 = 11.79$; df:1, $p < 0.001$), ($\chi^2 = 5.25$; df:1, $p < 0.05$), ($\chi^2 = 3.85$; df:1, $p < 0.05$) and ($\chi^2 = 17.52$; df:1, $p < 0.001$) reveal the correlation between access to traditional media viz., newspaper, radio, television and magazine respectively and access to new media like Internet. There is a significant relation between exposure to traditional media and new media among the respondents. This finding leads to the premise that those who used or continues to use traditional media tend to explore new media.

Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 162.15$; df:9 $p < 0.001$) analysis reveals that there is a association at 0.001 percent level of significance among the respondents regarding the period of exposure to Internet and frequency of surfing. The respondents who have been exposed to Internet over a period of more than two years surf the Internet more often than those with less period of exposure. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 9.02$; df:6 NS; $p > 0.05$) reveals that there is no correlation at 0.05 percent level of significance among the respondents regarding frequency of surfing Internet and surfing internet for entertainment. Respondents surf Internet frequently for various purposes, but surfing for entertainment is not the primary purpose. Hence 66 of them have ranked it number I medium of entertainment, 105 have ranked it number II and 630 have ranked it number III indicating that entertainment is not the first priority of the users. This finding endorses one of earlier studies regarding the digital divide in Internet use and its impact on socio-economic status. According to that study, youth in the age group of 13-18 years from high socio-economic status and cognitive ability use the Internet more for access to information and less for entertainment, but with lower socio-economic status and cognitive abilities of young people, the use of the Internet is more for entertainment than information (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006).

Why do users surf Internet? Only 28.3% surf Internet primarily to get information about movies, film stars and celebrities but the majority have no such purpose. However, 43.9% surf to download music and 46.4% use Internet for chatting. Interestingly, only 6% surf for viewing pornography and obscene films whereas 94% have never accessed such sexually explicit material on the net. Negligible 2.1% surf Internet to gamble but 97.9% has no such intention. The study

shows that 24.2% play computer games and use Internet for this purpose. 24% admitted to surf Internet to pass time without any specific reason. The study shows that those who surf Internet for porno material also tend to be intense players of video games establishing the tendency of users of porno sites. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 28.54$; $df:1$, $p < 0.01$) revealed that there is a relation at 0.01 percent level of significance among the respondents who surf Internet to watch porno and obscene films and play games.

Analysis ($\chi^2 = 6.86$; $df:6$ NS; $p > 0.05$) reveals that there is no significant relationship at 0.05 percent level of significance among the respondents regarding frequency of exposure to Internet and using Internet for educational purpose. Irrespective of how often they browse the Internet, people surf Net for educational purpose. Education is one of the top priorities of net surfers shows the analysis. Users have different reasons viz., class assignments (60%), search for course material (50.2%) and Writing articles, seminar papers, project work (50.8%). However, majority of the students (66.5%) do not depend on Internet for preparing for examination.

Though online trade and commerce are gaining popularity, the study reveals that not many are really into it. 10.5% surf Internet for trading, 12.2% are into e-banking and 10.5% do business online. Internet is used for varied reasons. Few of them use it for searching jobs (27.5%), online ticket booking (24.6%), taking online exams (18.9%) and paying bills (12.1%). Internet and e-mail go hand in hand. However, there are users of Internet who do not have email accounts (26.6%) but majority (73.4%) surf Internet for checking email. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 10.31$; $df:3$ $p < 0.01$) reveals that there is association at 0.01 percent level of significance among the respondents regarding occupation and sending e-mails. The usage of Internet for sending e-mails varies with the nature of job of the users or that of their parents.

News is surfed on the Internet by 54.8% but rest of them depends on traditional media like newspaper and TV. Is Internet information authentic? Yes says 81% vouching for the veracity of information that they retrieve from Net. Respondents have ranked different media viz., Internet (55.1%), Newspaper (21%), TV (20.7%) and Radio (2.1%) by ranking number I as sources of information but Internet emerges as the primary source of information knocking out popular print and electronic media.

Chatting on Internet does not seem to be popular among the users. Half of them chat rarely or have never ever chatted in their life. 19.4% claim to chat daily followed by 11.4% occasional usage of once a week which denotes people are not familiar with chatting. The possible reasons for not chatting so often could be that, majority of them may not have easy access to Internet or there may be access restriction imposed by the family or college/office or video chatting requires web camera and other paraphernalia or they might be feeling more comfortable speaking over the phone rather than chatting.

There exists a relationship between age and membership of social networking sites. Out of 801 respondents 472 are members of Orkut (60%) whereas other social networks viz., Facebook (32%), YouTube (22.8%), hi5 (11.9%), twitter (10.4%), My Space (4.7%), Wayne (2.5%) and Zorpia (2.1%) enjoy varying degrees of popularity. Invariably, youth are the largest users of social networks and Orkut is the most popular site sought after by 391 users in the age group of 18-24 years, followed by 196 young users of Facebook and 139 young members of YouTube.

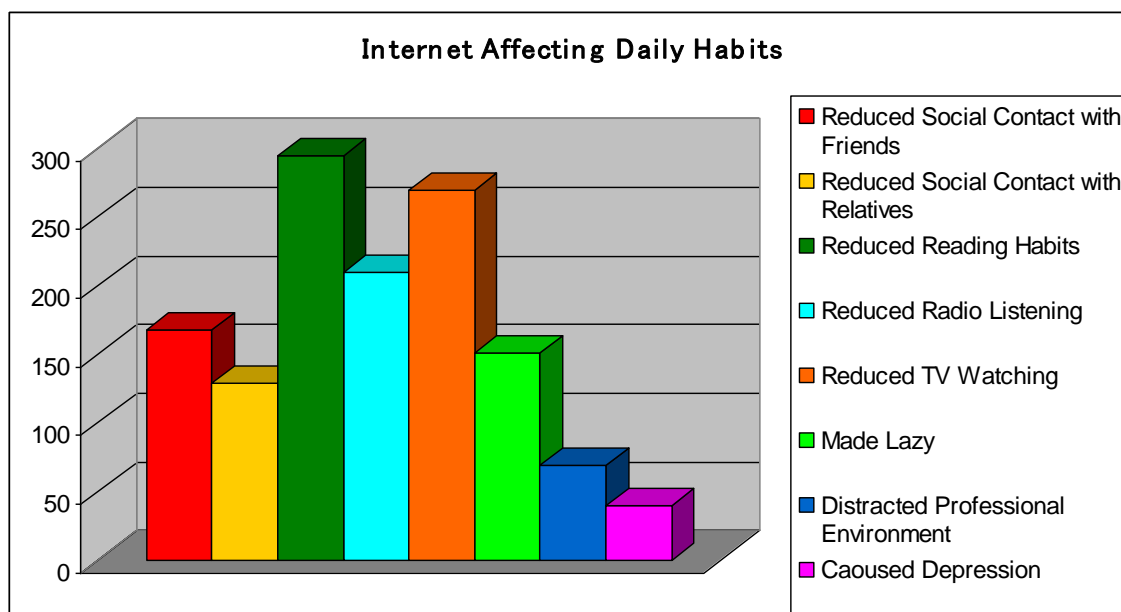
Socio-Cultural Impact of Internet

Internet has brought changes in 81% of the respondents while only 19% have said there is no noticeable change in life due to Internet. So Internet has changed life for majority of the users.

Internet has influenced 21% of the respondents to improve their physical appearance, while 79% have not noticed any significant change in their appearance owing to Net ($t=-16.4299$, $df: 799$). Internet has influenced the behaviour of 26.8% of the respondents while 73.2% have not experienced any behavioural change owing to Internet ($t=-21.9419$, $df: 799$). Internet has influenced the attitude of 35.2% of the respondents while 64.8% see no change in their attitude ($t=-8.3739$, $df: 799$). Internet has influenced the dressing style of 11.2% of the respondents while 88.8% see no change in their outfit ($t=-21.9419$, $df: 799$).

The presumption that Internet affects socializing is not endorsed by the findings. Only 21% and 16.1% agree that Internet has affected their relationship with friends ($t=-16.4299$, $df: 799$) and relatives ($t=-19.1859$, $df: 799$) respectively. Endorsing World Internet Survey findings, the study shows that 79% feel that Internet does not obstruct socializing but on the contrary it helps widen social contacts. Marriage is an important social institution in Indian society where the intervention of online matrimony has broken several stereotypes. In a society which patronizes arranged marriages, matrimonial websites have changed the social order. Over 32.7% of users not only are aware of matrimonial websites but have approved such marriages reflecting social change in a highly traditional society like India. Matrimonial sites like *bharatmatrimony*, *shadi.com*, are so popular that they have cut into the advertising revenue of classified pages of leading newspapers.

Regarding criticisms about Internet, the findings show that users do not agree that Internet exposure causes lethargy (81.1%) or disruption in profession (91.4%) or depression (95%). Only 18.9% of them felt that Internet has made them lazy ($t=17.6313$, $df: 799$), 8.6% felt there is distraction in profession ($t=-23.43$, $df: 799$) and 5 % attributed depression to Internet ($t=-25.47$, $df: 799$). Do people get frustrated when not using Internet? 19.6% agree and feel socially paralyzed but 80.4% do not agree with this notion. There is criticism that Internet has led to decline in reading habits and exposure to other media. The survey shows that 36.8% have agreed that their reading habit has taken a beating with more time spent on Internet surfing. Some users feel that their radio listening (26.2%) and TV viewing (33.7%) have declined owing to Internet.



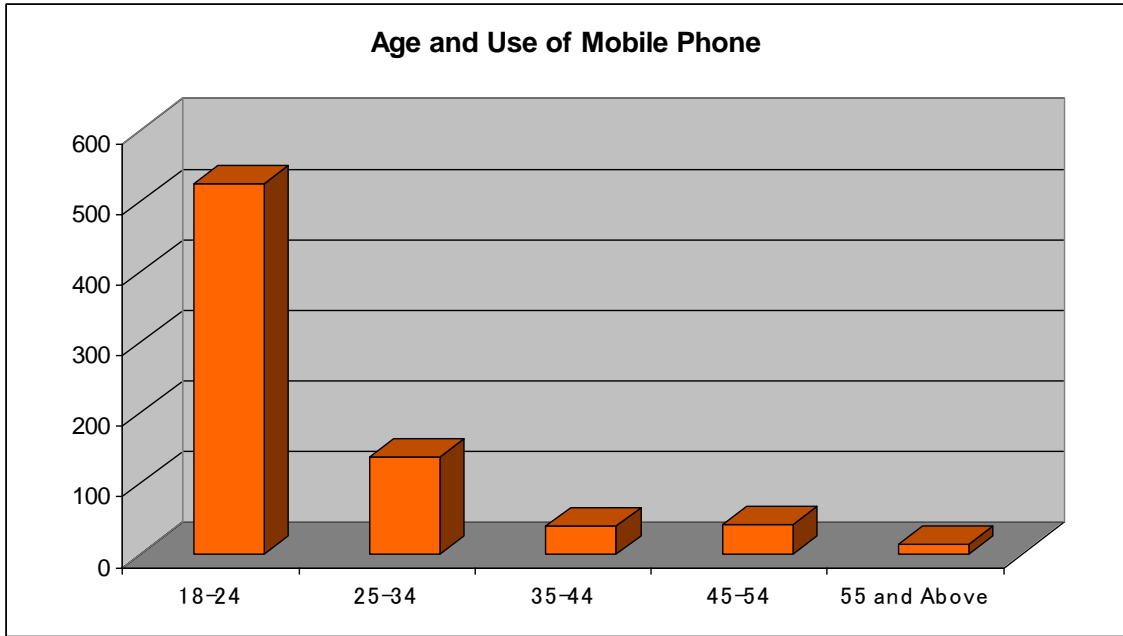
Internet has increased level of knowledge (75.3%), improved language proficiency (51.9%), increased self-confidence (41.3%), has given identity among friends (43.1%) and increased social contacts (44.6%) say the findings. However, very few users agree that it has helped them in personality development (15.5%) and improved economic status (16.2%). Blogging is fast developing into a pastime. More than half of the respondents (55.6 %) are aware of the blogs and bloggers and around 18.5% of them are active bloggers and enjoy writing blogs. Most of the users (87.6%) feel that Internet gives a sense of connected with the world and cherish the feeling of belongingness and sharing when so many friends and members wish them on their birthdays, anniversaries and celebrations. Truly Internet has shrunk the world and erased the geographical boundaries.

Cyber crimes viz., child trafficking, fraud, hacking and other misdemeanours are on the rise with increase in the penetration of Internet. The users are apprehensive about misuse of personal information (61.5 %), children's safety (61.7%) and cyber bully (8.9%) on Internet related activities. According to Livingstone, the Pew Internet and American Life Project of 2000 has found that nearly 60% of those online had received messages (of any kind) from strangers. In the UK, NOP's Kids.net survey found that 29% of children using the Internet would give out their home address and 14% their email address. One more report that has ample evidence of actual crimes against children, suggested that incidents of adult sex offenders meeting children online and gaining their trust are increasing in both the UK and USA, the key group at risk being girls aged 13-17 (Livingstone, 2003).

MOBILE PHONES

Profile of Mobile Phone Users;

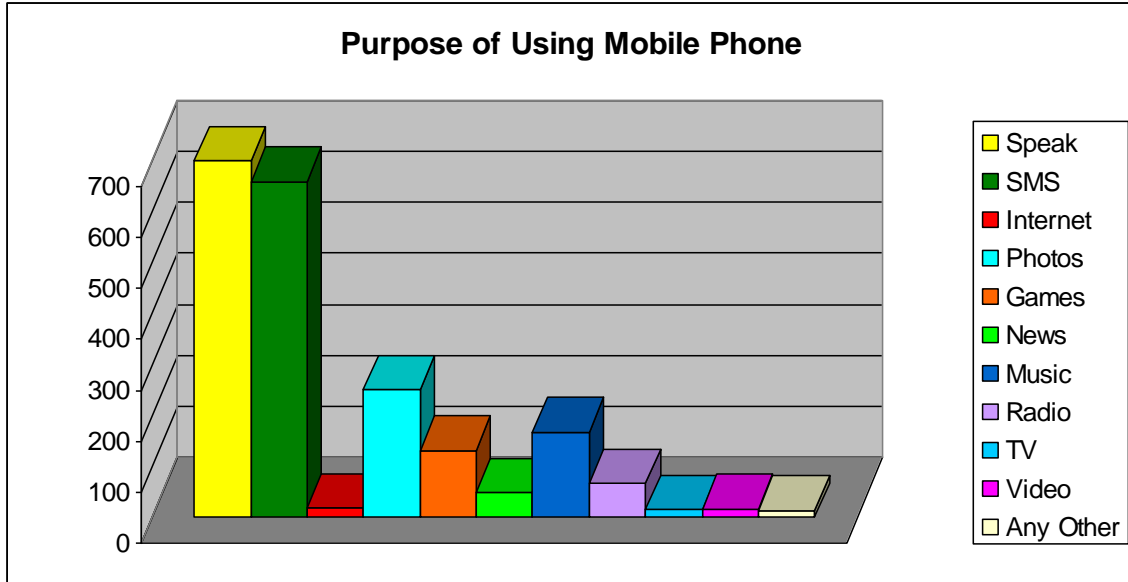
Mobile phones are penetrating Indian society in a big way. Mobile phones are cheaper than ever before in countries like India and therefore are affordable. Mobile phones are used extensively and have become a powerful medium of communication. The study shows that 39.8% are single mobile phone homes whereas 60.2% are multiple mobile phone owning families. Over 54.9% of the respondents make an average of 5 calls per day, 26.6% make between 6-10 calls per day whereas 11-15 calls are made by 8.9% of respondents daily and less than 10% make more than 16 calls per day.



Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 6.33$; df: 4 NS; $p > 0.05$) reveals that there is no correlation at 0.05 percent level of significance among the respondents regarding age and use of mobile phones. Hence, age has no bearing on the usage of mobile phones. People of all age groups use mobile phones. SMS is one significant feature that is used to the core. Interestingly 9.2% receive as well as send more than 100 messages per day. On daily basis users send SMSs as following: 39.8% send <5 SMSs, 24.3% send 6-25 messages, 10.9% send 26-50 SMSs, 6.2% send 51-75 SMS, 9.5% send 76-100 SMSs. The figures are really amazing because there are as many as 74 (9.2%) people among the respondents who send almost hundred messages per day.

Mobile phones have become affordable because the cost of mobile set and service by government and private companies offer low tariffs. The survey reveals that users (33.8%) spend less than Rs.100 per month and an equal percentage spend less than Rs.300 on mobile phones making it the cheapest medium. Only 5.5% spend Rs.1000>.

What is mobile phone used for? The survey says, to speak (95.05%), SMS (83.9%), photos (31.2%), music (20.8%), gaming (16.3%), Internet (13.8%), radio (8.3%), news (6.1%), video (3%) and TV (1.8%),

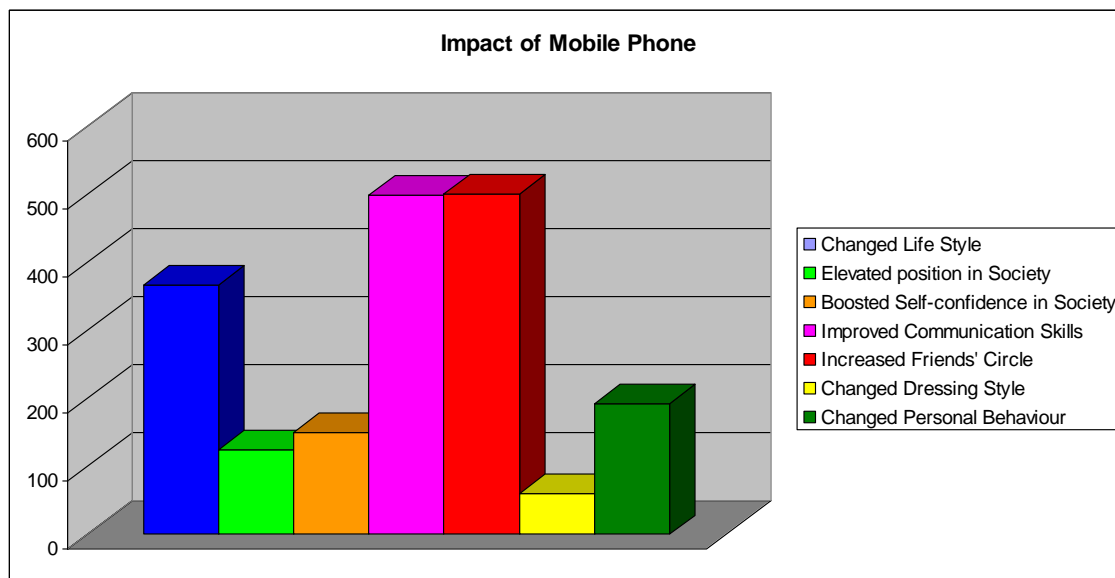


Mobile phones and social change

Many but not a majority have admitted to the social impact of mobile phone. Over 45.8% have felt change in life style owing to mobile phones but many (84.3%) do not believe that owning the device has elevated their status in the society. There is absolutely no relation between boosting one's self confidence and mobile phones. Psychologically mobile phones help in overcoming loneliness say some users (38.8%) while 43.8% feel that its possession creates a sense of security. A majority (76.2%) says that they would not use mobile phone to pretend talking to overcome loneliness or fear, while 23.8% have accepted that they would pretend talking to overcome loneliness or fear in public places. However, users are divided in their opinion on whether mobile phones give identity and sense of belongingness. 79% say no and 21% say yes to the identity notion.

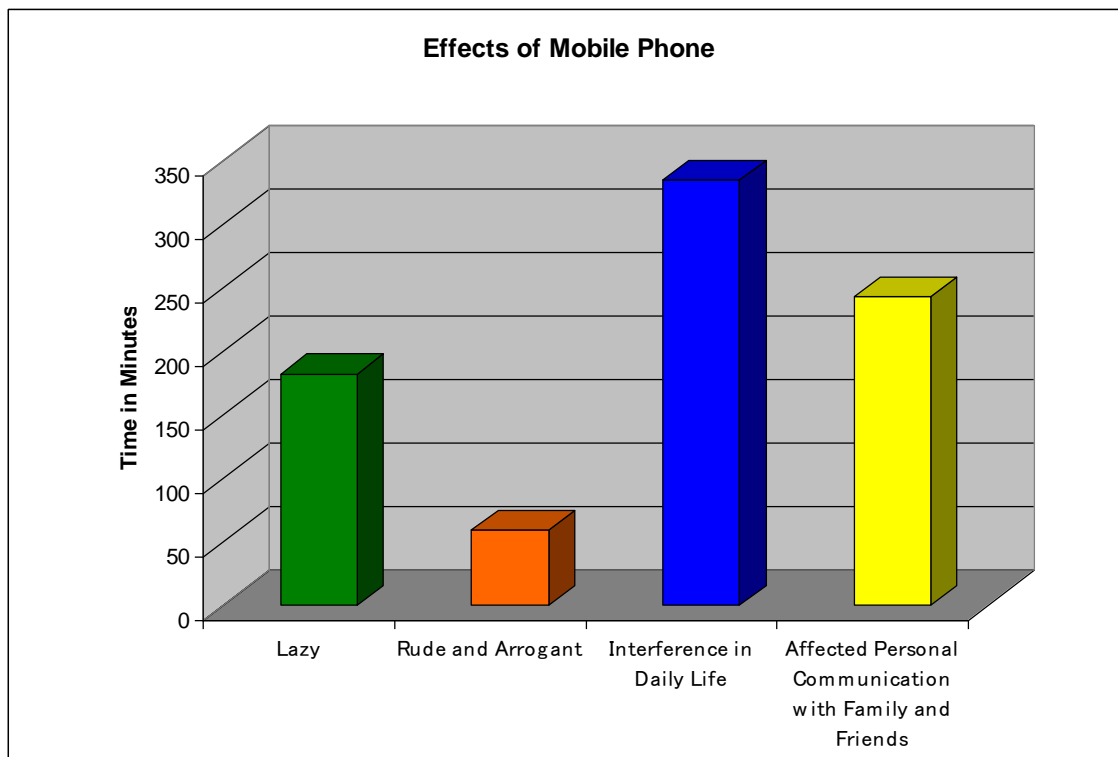
Majority (87.1%) do not use mobile phones for developing intimacy with opposite sex. The survey says that mobile phones does not improve professional efficiency (61.9%); doesn't influence change in dressing style(92.5%) and has not caused change in personal behaviour (76%). The language is one of the skills that has undergone transformation for the worst with the use of mobile phones. The texting has created a new mobile lingo among young users consisting of shorthand codes and acronyms. Livingstone observes that 'as younger users "gather" with their other peers on the web, they generate a social atmosphere that's uniquely all their own' (Livingstone, 2005). This new lingo is prevalent more among students and its popularity has prompted mobile service companies to offer free SMS packages (100-200 SMSs) in India. Only young users understand what the lingo means. The mobile language used by the students defies grammar, spelling and meaning. Only the users know what it means and therefore there is rise in the use of slang and other words not found in the dictionary. A new online lingo glossary is needed to document and interpret the populist language. It is also true that while different factors, such as demographics like sex and age, largely impact the way youngsters are using their Internet communication tools; they all share a basic understanding of their mutually-created online lingo and slang (Shields, 2007).

The study points out that 78.5% feel that sending and receiving of messages does not affect their language capability but 21.5% feel it badly affects language usage. It is reported in earlier studies that colleges are reporting higher rates of illiteracy and teachers of our country are saying that papers are being written with shortened words, improper capitalization and punctuation, characters like --&--, --\$--, and --@-- (Jameson, 2007). Several articles indicate that younger generation uses IM and other social media on a frequent basis often use bad grammar, poor punctuation, and improper abbreviations in academic writing (Daniel Ng, 2010). Daniel Ng observes that ‘perhaps the scariest part of this is that many adolescents are using their IM language without even realizing it. Daniel quotes L’Abbe when he says that IM and social media lingo is becoming so commonplace, younger generations are putting it down on paper and slipping it into everyday conversations without even giving it so much as a second thought’ (L’Abbe, 2006 quoted by Daniel Ng, 2010). ‘Frequent use of these new technologies has reached a point where today’s younger generation no longer recognizes their online jargon as anything unusual or out of sync with proper, daily conversing’ (L’Abbe, 2006, quoted by Daniel Ng,2010). However, on the positive front, users in the present study feel texting messages develops communication skills (62.3%) and widens friends’ circle (52.5%).



People don't become lethargic due to use of mobile phones. 77.3% do not agree that mobile phones lead to laziness but the rest of them do. There is wide criticism that youngsters are rude and arrogant and is attributed to change in life style including use of gadgets like mobile phones. Though 92.6% users agree with the criticism, they don't attribute it to the use of mobile phones. Is mobile phone a bane or a boon? 58.2% feel that phones don't interfere in their daily life but 41.8% say it does. Preoccupation with mobile phones has changed the way family and friends communicate with each other. 69.7% feel that mobile phones have no impact on ties with family and friends but 30.3% say it does. Culturally, Indian society has not yet openly accepted the concept of dating or live- in relationships. Mobile phones have influenced liberal thinking and proactive attitude as parents or friends are more tolerant to the mobile chat between boys and girls. However, the study shows that 65.4% think it is harmful and 34.6% feel it is harmless with

the boys and girls talking freely over mobile phones reflecting the conservative attitude of the Indian society. Culturally most of them (86.5%) still think that it is not inevitable for the mobile talk between boys and girls but few (13.5%) of them have expressed their progressive attitude towards the social issue. Users are divided in their opinion about whether the free mobile talk between boys and girls exceeded the permissible limits of the Indian society. 59.1% feel that talk over mobile between both the sexes should be within limits whereas 40.9% think that it need not be restricted. Surprisingly, 93.3% feel that mobile talk between boys and girls that has pervaded Indian society is not acceptable. The users overwhelmingly (94.4%) feel that this type of talk is not acceptable in Indian society and culture as well. A low percentage of users (12.9%) have admitted using mobile phones to respond to TV reality or other programmes.



Conclusion

The socio-cultural impact of internet reveals that internet has made difference in the lives of the users with regard to language and increase in the level of knowledge. However, the respondents feel that internet has not influenced the physical appearance and dressing style. Internet has increased rather than decreased socialization with friends and relatives say the study. Further contrary to popular belief internet has not affected the reading habits of the people. Exposure to internet has also not affected the people's access to conventional media like radio and television. Respondents claim that these new media has not made people less hard working and has not come in the way of professional duties and are not a cause for depression, frustration and loneliness. However, the study shows that lack of computer literacy develops inferiority complex among people and people also view internet as a symbol of modernity and they felt connected to the world. Marriage is an important and oldest social institution that determines social order in Indian society. The intervention of online matrimony has broken several stereotypes and has changed the attitude and behavior of the people towards the oldest

social institution, marriage. In a society which patronizes arranged marriages, matrimonial websites have changed the social order.

An overwhelming majority of people use and own mobile phones in India. The study shows majority of the users do not give in to the premise that mobile texting has affected their language capability but believes that it has improved their communication skills. People are divided in their opinion on whether mobile phones changed the way they live but firmly believe it has not elevated their social status. Mobile phones have increased socialization, says the study. Though many of the respondents are members of social media, they are scared to upload personal information as they suspect abuse of personal information. Nevertheless, majority of them feel that the information available in the Internet is reliable and authentic.

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