

Influence of Social Media among Gypsies: A Case Study in Tamil Nadu

¹S.Shridevi, ²Dr.P.Govindaraju

¹Ph.D Scholar, ²Professor, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India.

¹rsshridevi@gmail.com, ²pgraju1961@gmail.com

Abstract - Today we are living in a digital era. It altered the way of our lives from all the spheres. The social networking sites are the effective platform for the people to inform, share, educate and to entertain. There are many studies which are done in the field of social networking. The Gypsies in Tamil Nadu are called as 'Narikuravar'. They are one of the marginalized communities of Tamil Nadu. They are deprived of the basic resources of life yet they are aware of the digital technologies and SNS. It is observed that the Gypsies have the digital participation which may be different from the main stream society. But it cannot be neglected that they are ignorant about it. There are economical and cultural barriers which are associated in the digital platform. This paper aims to understand in depth about the access, the participation level, usage pattern, communicating style and its influence on them. Further this study explores the scope for the better participation of the Gypsies in the digital world. The study incorporates qualitative method by snowball sampling through in-depth interview among the Gypsies in Tamil Nadu. It can be concluded that, the number of participation in the SNS among the Gypsies is low, but their usage pattern have a direct influence which helps them to adopt a main stream lifestyle. So this kind of change might empower them and likely to mingle with the mainstream society.

Keywords — Gypsies, New media, Social networking sites, Narikuravar, Social networking sites, Nomadic community

I. INTRODUCTION

Today in the era of digital advancements, the social media is playing an important role in effective communication. As we are aware that social media is a type of media which is based on computer based technology. It enables the user to share ideas, messages, data and helps to build a network within a community. The social media is based on new media and offers users to transmit messages in all forms electronically. Any gadget can be used to participate in the social media. Social media can take the form of a variety of tech-enabled activities, such as photo sharing, blogging, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, business networks, virtual worlds, reviews and more. It is used to keep in touch with friends and extended family, network for career opportunities, find people from all over the globe who share a common interest, share content and more. Those who engage in these activities are part of a virtual social network.

The present study aims to understand the participation level of Gypsies in the social media in Tamil Nadu. The Gypsy community in Tamil Nadu is termed as 'Narikuravar'. 'Nari' means jackal, 'kuravar' means people. They belong to Dom community which is a community of Indian

Gypsy. Literally, the Tamil word 'Narikuravar' means 'the fox or jackal hunters.' 'Narikuravar' is a non technical term which is used to denote semi-tribal or tribal communities which have the connection ethno linguistically. This study deals with the participation of Gypsies in SNS and its influence in their lifestyle. Although they are one of the marginalized community and lacks basic necessities in life, the current status of their life can be said as slightly improved after incorporating the media, and the education into their lives. The Gypsies have the access to all the media which the common people have the access to. They have the exposure of the new media and the components which they use in their daily lives. In spite of their poverty the truth cannot be denied that the community is gradually incorporating their lives with the SNS (Social Networking Sites) and reaping the benefits.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the media access among the Gypsies
- To study the mobile phone usage pattern among the Gypsies
- To analyze the social media access pattern among the Gypsies
- To estimate the influence of social media in the lifestyle of Gypsies

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of SNS and nomadic and tribal communities, there are handfuls of studies that are related to the present study. The reason is that, the communities still long for their identity in the main stream society. They are unable to mingle with the society due to cultural and class barriers. These communities are backward and discriminated over the time. There are many issues that are faced by them, to name a few like poverty, unemployment, unhygienic health practices, child marriage, social neglect and the like. So based on these aspects, some of the reviews of the recent studies are given below.

In a study done by Abu Sayeed (2017), which deals with the impact of social media in tribal life opined that the media has changed the ways of the tribal life. It is felt that there are many success stories in field of health care among the community. It is suggested that the social Media can help provide that, media which cares for a well-integrated society and believes in having social responsibility. Services like Face book, twitter provide a mass reach, but of a population which can afford to have the required technology to avail the service but can help connect the large population. It is cautioned that once these SNS are accessed with high level, social media doesn't influence the people in a way that alienates them from the real potential of these platforms. The impact can be seen through many examples and these examples are of not just Social media like – Face book but with the use of internet NGO's like Gramvaani have flourished, defining social media in a new perspective which is of development and of a social responsibility.

It is sensed that with the advent of digital technologies for effective communication, the traditional form of communication which is linked with the culture tribal and nomadic communities are decreasing. The fact can't be denied that with the modernization has a serious impact in their lifestyle of such communities which may have a positive and negative effect. Social change has brought openness and acceptance for changes in the form, structure and revival in the traditional folk media that helped in regaining its importance in the social communication. All over the world traditional folk media is facing threat of death in the ever-changing and globalizing environment. Socio-economic modernization and facilitation of modern information and transportation facilities bring internationalized popular culture that is replacing various folk forms and presentation from the social communication (Dr. Raghavendra Mishra & K. Newme, 2015). From this, it can be considered that folk media is an important component for preserving a specific culture and tradition effectively among the tribal communities. But it can't be denied that if the tribal's or nomads integrate new media in their lives, then they can reap its potentials and can

empower themselves with the digital information that can help the communities to alter their lifestyle so that they have better their lives along with the main stream society. The modern communication media is one of the ways to bridge the gap between the nomadic and main stream society. This might be a considered as a ground level step towards the modernization of the communities. "Easy and effective communication will certainly pave the way for their progress and accelerate their contacts with outside world. It was found in the course of time the tribe has undergone certain changes due to effective mass media communication. As they live in nuclear type families the easily communicate with each other. With the advent of cable television, cinemas, television, Internet and Mobile phones they could connect with others easily and help them to adapt to the new ideas and development in the society at large". (Dr. Janet Mary, 2017). Her research concludes that mass media has very much influenced the culture and tradition of 'Irulas' (a tribal community) in the region of Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu. Such findings are relevant to the present study which deals with 'Narikuravar' one of the nomadic community of Tamil Nadu.

It is observed that the mass media has been playing a prominent role for altering the lifestyle for the nomadic community. The presented reviews focused on the role of media and tribal communities. There are very few studies that are focused on their online behavior. This study will be helpful to understand the influence of the social media in a nomadic community called 'Narikuravar' in Tamil Nadu, India.

III. METHODOLOGY

The selected nomadic community of Tamil Nadu is marginalized, discriminated and socially isolated from the other communities. The community has many issues like Poverty, Child Marriage, High Maternal and Infant Mortality Rate, Unemployment, Domestic Violence, Alcoholism and the like. After the emergence and the acceptance of mobile technologies in their lives, there are certain changes which are perceived by the researcher. So the study aimed to understand the given context. The study employed qualitative method of research. This method is used for the study to understand the objectives of the study in an in-depth manner. Since the population of the study is highly illiterate, qualitative methods were suitable to obtain data from the respondents effectively for the present study. The financial status of the selected community is very low. Though there are families who have the access to the social media. Major number of the families has the access to the smart phone but only few families access the social media. Snowball technique is used to get the samples from one family to another as they are the ones who access the social media in a regular basis. Semi-structured interview schedule is used to gather relevant data from five women

and five men each from two colonies (Gypsy settlements) in Tamil Nadu namely Theni and Tirunelveli. One colony in each district has been chosen based on their SNS usage pattern. There are 192 families in total, 76 families in Theni and 116 families in Tirunelveli. The interview were recorded and written in verbatim. Field observations are undertaken in the Gypsy colonies. The data were collected in the period of March and June 2018. The data is analyzed through interpretive analysis from the in-depth interview of the Gypsies. The observation is done on the Gypsies profile in social media. The objectives of the study are aimed to present the changes that may have occurred in the Gypsies lifestyle after accessing the SNS.

IV. MAJOR OBSERVATIONS

• Media access among the Gypsies

The Gypsies are one of the extremely marginalized communities in Tamil Nadu. The community is facing various problems that are associated with their health, education, occupation and cultural backwardness which results in social isolation from the main stream society. In order to understand the media access of the community, selected respondents were interviewed and through field observation. It is observed that the Gypsies are having the access to traditional and modern media. The traditional media like the radio, which are highly used by the Gypsies who are above fifty years old during their time of work. Usually Gypsies sell products like beads which are mainly worn by the people in times of pilgrimage, honey, combs, clips, copper rings, lucky charms that are equipped with medicinal herbs, plastic toys and hair bands. With the help of the Govt. scheme of free distribution of television, Based on the field observation maximum Gypsy families has the access to the television where they watch serials, movies of their favorite political leader like Dr. M.G. Ramachandran. They also prefer Kamal Hasan and Rajni Kanth films for their sense of style. Reality shows are more likely preferred by the younger generations as well as the older generations.

It is noted that out of 192 families, 170 families has the Tata Sky and Airtel Connection for their Television. Handful of the families has the access to high end LCD television, where the neighbors and children of the community tend to watch their favorite programs. The older generations in the age group of 40s-80s have the access to mobile phones of basic model like Nokia 1110, which is mainly used to make and receive calls. The younger generation in the age group of 18s-30s has the access to smart phones in the brand of Micromax, Samsung, and Gionee. The price of the mobile phone ranges from 4000rs-8000rs. They are the ones who have the access to the new media as well. They tend to recharge for their mobile internet based on their income

per day which may be understood as a week or month basis. They are the ones who have the accounts in Facebook and Whatsapp which they use it for their personal and professional purpose.

• Mobile phone usage pattern among the Gypsies

In order to understand the mobile phone usage pattern, the respondents were interviewed and their mobile phone is viewed to know the usage pattern more effectively as they couldn't explain it properly. It is noted that the mobile phones which belong to the basic model are mainly used for the purpose of making and receiving calls. The Gypsies who have the access to the smart phones use it to make calls, check on their Whatsapp messages, watch videos in you tube particularly songs, news, and videos, check on their Facebook for the new updates from their friends etc. It is clearly found that, they are not much aware of the potentials of using a smart phone. As it is already mentioned that the present generation are the flag bearers in the usage of new media, they are gradually exploring the scope of using a smart phone. The mobile phone is also seen as a symbol of status or prestige among the community which is mostly poverty ridden. So having a high quality smart phone is definitely a thing to boast off. It is observed that the Gypsies are well versed in playing games like candy crush, subway surfer, super zombies, racing and card games. In real life they are mostly seen involved in playing card games with their community member which has a direct influence in using their mobile phones, as they tend to install the similar kind of card games.

Selfie culture is taking a boom in the community. Youngsters are having numerous numbers of selfie in their mobile phones which can be assumed that the present generation is having a selfie addition with their smart phone. The family communication among the Gypsy family is low in compared to the times without the mobile phones. They tend to be involved more with the mobile phones. But it is observed that they are also equally engaged with the physical activity with their community members, which helps them to have a sound health. The younger generation Gypsies are much familiar with the mobile applications through they are not able to name it individually. They are able to tell the uses of certain applications, though the applications are rarely used, while the older generation of the community members is unable to identify the applications and tell the uses of it.

• Social media access pattern among the Gypsies

Today there are many social media that are much prevalent in the digital world. These media enables a

community to join together and bridges with the predominant society. This type of communication through the social media proves to be effective and easy to transfer the information without any barrier. In order to analyze the social media access pattern among the Gypsies, the Facebook profiles of ten Gypsies in Facebook were observed. The posts which they tend to like, the posts which they share, the friends circle, their commenting pattern, type of messages were observed. The Whatsapp account of the selected samples were viewed for the purpose of understanding their messaging pattern, types of photos, graphical messages shared, audio/ video content shared, status and display picture preferred are observed.

It is noted that, the younger generation in the mentioned age group are very much active in social media network. The head of the community who comes in the senior citizen category also have the access to the social media for the purpose of acquiring news and latest political updates. The younger generations are livelier in the virtual world. In the Facebook, they tend to upload their pictures either individually and in group during an occasion in their community. They also upload group photos. Usually they tend to like the actor and actress photos with some love or motivational quotes. They share funny videos or some which related to crime, devotion, useful tips for daily life, songs, and news. Maximum they have their friends within their community across the state. It is also found that they have the contact with their community members who live in abroad specifically Malaysia. Other community members are also in their friends list who are close to them like the news reporters, NGO worker, and political representatives. The political representatives are mainly in contact with the head of the community. They go there for the purpose of their business. They tend to like the media content of entertainment, devotional, news related, crime and thriller oriented. They use mainly audio messages to share any information on personal basis. As they lack proper education, it is easy for them to send messages through pictures and audio messages. So this is a main mode for them to transfer the information. It is found that, the Whatsapp usage pattern is also same as the Facebook. The Whatsapp usage is more preferred than Facebook due to its feasibility. In Whatsapp, they share images of their community, their personal images taken in times any special event or festival. It is observed that selfies are shared more among the community members than the normal photographs. Audio messages are shared of news updates or any forwarded message. Good morning and good night text are shared with images. Videos of stunt, collages, ceremonies in the colony, useful tips for cooking and hairstyles are of often

shared through the Whatsapp. Video calls are also utilized among the community members. One of the important observations is that literacy is playing a major role in the access of social media, as the community is highly illiterate and they rarely complete their secondary education. Literates and those who are involved in SNS tend to develop their ability to take an active participation the digital world through access of social media.

• Influence of social media in the lifestyle of Gypsies

In order to estimate the influence of social media, the researcher observed the influence of SNS through the interactions and behavior. It is noted that the Gypsies have the ability to grasp the knowledge effectively from the classes they attend than the other children. This was opined by a Govt. school teacher in Theni. They learn things quickly from their peers and other community members. There are no barriers for them in learning except the personal interest. It is found that with the influence of the social media, the community's life has been gradually transforming. The reason behind the statement is that, they tend to adopt the practices which they perceive in the social media. They feel to buy things and use it which they are exposed in it. When see a new dress or hair style then the Gypsy women feel to adopt or buy it. The health related videos or messages have an influence in their lifestyle. They take precautions for it. They prefer to have hygienic surroundings in spite of living in unhygienic conditions. The advertisements which tend to appear while accessing the SNS or in YouTube prove helpful for them to identify the products in a market. This is indirectly related them to keep themselves and the surroundings clean. A very few younger generations of the Gypsies try to make out new type of dishes which they see in SNS or Whatsapp. The Gypsies are highly involved in making beaded necklaces and ornaments. So when they see craft items, the feel to make it. But due to lack of skill and training they are unable to do it. It is also noted that, they feel inferior when they couldn't have a certain product which they see in the popular media. Poverty is one of the major issues among the community so maximum number of the families couldn't afford what a few families who are well to do can get. There are significant changes in their behavior and outlook which may have a direct link to the access and the usage of the SNS. This is observed by their way they talk and approach. The Gypsy men tend to watch videos from YouTube of their favorite actors. They tend to have a similar outlook of the actor. From that, it is passed to their peers and other community members. Their traditional way of behavior is

gradually changing who have an optimum exposure of the media. This can be justified with one of the respondent's statement which reflected the sense that instead of spending the money for 3 hours in a movie theater, they can spend that amount for their net pack which they can use it for a month. So here we can say that the mobile and SNS usage is more than the conventional media.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study deals with the influence of SNS among Gypsy Communities. Since this nomadic community is highly illiterate, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach to get the data from the respondents. As it provides clear picture to understand a nomadic community from grassroots level. The media is one of the important pillars for the development of this nomadic community. Along with the television, the SNS is also a major aspect in the development of this community. This is one of the baseline studies of how the nomadic community accesses the new media and its influence in their lifestyle. As the trend of accessing the social media is blooming among the community members. This new media access acts as an important role in transforming a lifestyle of a marginalized community. The changes can be perceived in terms of health, behavior, attitude, food and in cultural aspects. Since literacy is one of the major problems in the community, it is interpreted that the SNS may motivate them to pursue their studies in order to access the media effectively which may be consider as one of the building block for their development of the community. The younger generations are more involved in SNS than the older generation. They are the ones who have completed their primary education and have the ability to read and write. So it is predicted that they will motivate their kids to study effectively so that they can understand and gain knowledge from the SNS. These act a platform for their cultural change and adopt a healthy lifestyle from the traditional one. For each media there is positive and negative side. As it is the budding stage in the access of SNS and the participation, the community may understand the pros and cons of the media gradually. It will help them to balance between the mainstream and their tradition by adopting the reasonable methods for empowering their community.

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