



**SYMBIOSIS CENTRE FOR MEDIA  
AND COMMUNICATION**



# SCMC ॠMANA 2025

## International Research Conference

**SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)**  
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**Compendium Designed By:**

Rajat Bandopadhyay



**SYMBIOSIS CENTRE FOR MEDIA  
AND COMMUNICATION**



# **SCMC** **ॐ MANA** **2025**

International Research Conference

**Digital Democracies: Intersections of Influence,  
Consumption, Culture and Identity in South Asia**

## Foreword

In 2016, a private telecom conglomerate, Reliance, offered free internet to over 100 million users, leading to record data consumption and the mushrooming of digital platforms across the country. During 2018–24, mobile data consumption increased from 5 GB to 20 GB per person per month, and India's 400 million social media users spent an average of 17 hours per week—far higher than in China and the United States.

The digital platforms gained further traction during the 2024 Parliamentary Elections (now called a YouTube election), with live streaming of election rallies, roadshows, and digital influencers. The ubiquity of digital media has enabled politicians to engage directly with audiences, bypassing mainstream intermediaries that traditionally shaped public perception. The “digital Indian politician” now tailors narratives to suit segmented audiences in an unmediated landscape, altering the nature of democracy by weaponising language to exploit social divides. In India, the rise of digital platforms like X (previously known as Twitter) has amplified long-standing social and cultural tensions, often reinforcing discriminatory structures. Spaces that once offered marginalized communities a voice, now frequently echo existing societal biases. Linguistic violence and divisive rhetoric proliferate, with the highest volumes recorded on platforms like X, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook.

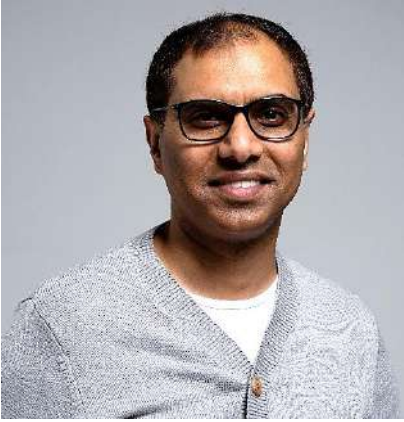
In a systematic study of Twitter tweets (9,040 between 2009–2016), a staggering total of 129 themes emerged, including religious, social, conservative, political, caste, and tribal concerns. These patterns highlight the growing interplay between fragmented social media audiences expressing their concerns, vote banks, and political campaigns, thereby presenting a complex and evolving challenge for democratic processes.

Apart from reshaping the political landscape, the digital sphere has also amplified the participation of diverse voices, bringing issues of gender, caste, class, and community to the forefront. The South Asian region exemplifies these digital disruptions, where rapid technological adoption has transformed media, culture, and political engagement. This digital revolution has not only deepened democratization processes but has also revealed their complexities, particularly in the intersections of digital influence with consumerism, identity, and cultural production.

This third edition of the SCMC Pramana Research Conference aims to critically examine these shifts in the South Asian context. By exploring the intersections of digital influence, politics, identity, and consumerism, the conference offers a platform for rich discussions about the opportunities and challenges posed by this transformative era. It is our hope that this conference inspires critical reflection and collaborative inquiry, contributing to the discourse on building a more inclusive and equitable digital future.

Dr. Sreeram Gopalkrishnan  
Director, SCMC & Chairman  
Pramana Research Conference 2025

## Chief Guest



### **Dr. Rajinder Dudrah**

Professor of Cultural Studies & Creative Industries,  
Birmingham City University, United Kingdom.

Dr Rajinder Dudrah is a Professor of Cultural studies and Creative Industries in the College of English and Media at Birmingham City University, UK. He has lectured, researched, and published widely across film, media, cultural studies and the creative industries, having published 3 single-authored books, co-edited another 12 books. He is the founding co-editor of the *journal South Asian Popular Culture (Taylor and Francis)*.

Professor Dudrah has co-curated several national exhibitions on film and popular music and worked closely with numerous artists and creative institutions to deliver research projects across varied publics. He has also successfully co-supervised to completion of 21 PhD students and is currently the recipient of a prestigious Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2022–25) working towards his next monograph entitled *E-Bollywood: Popular Hindi Cinema in the Age of New Media*. In April 2023, Professor Dudrah was honoured by the South Asian Literary Association (USA), with the award of Distinguished Achievement in Scholarship to the Field of South Asian Studies.

## Keynote Speaker

### **Dr. Xenia Zeiler**

Professor of South Asian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Helsinki, Finland.



Dr Xenia Zeiler is Professor of South Asian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research and teaching are situated at the intersection of digital media, culture, and society, specifically related to India and global Indian communities.

Her focus within this wider field of digital culture is video games and gaming research, in India and beyond. Closely related to and supporting this are her other major research areas. For instance, to understand how digital spaces such as social media or video games, and more traditional media formats such as film or TV, shape and are shaped by various actors, she researches and teaches digital religion, popular culture, cultural heritage, and mediatization processes.

## Guest Speaker



### **Dr. Maya Dodd**

Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Languages, Flame University

Dr. Maya Dodd received her Ph.D. from Stanford University and subsequent post-doctoral fellowships at the Committee for South Asian Studies at Princeton University, USA and at the Centre for Law and Governance, JNU, India. As a means to bringing new questions in imagining cultural issues to the fore in India, especially in terms of public history, she has been associated with Digital Humanities in India and her current research is focused on questions of the digital in India. Dr Dodd teaches at FLAME University and has served as the Assistant Dean for Teaching, Learning, and Engagement, Chair of the Department of Humanities and Languages, and Director of the FLAME Centre for South Asia. She also teaches Literary and Cultural Studies in the Department of Humanities. Currently, she is the Director of the FLAME Centre for Legislative Education and Research and is working on a digital resource for legislative history in India.

## Guest Speaker



### **Dr. Avishek Ray**

Associate Professor of Cultural Studies,  
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences  
National Institute of Technology, Silchar, Assam

Dr. Avishek Ray is Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at the National Institute of Technology, Silchar. He is the author of *The Vagabond in the South Asian Imagination: Representation, Agency & Resilience* (Routledge, 2022), and co-author of *Digital Expressions of the Self(ie): The Social Life of Selfies in India* (Routledge, 2024). His research appears in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *Contemporary South Asia*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies, Tourism, Culture & Communication*, among others. He has also held research fellowships at the University of Edinburgh, Purdue University Library, Centre for Advanced Study Sofia, Mahidol University, IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies (Vienna), Pavia University and University of Minnesota.

He is currently working on a co-authored book project, provisionally titled as *Networked Mobilities in the Wake of the Pandemic: Remediating Calcutta*. In 2021, his academic excellence was recognized with the Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellowship.



## Guest Speaker



### **Dr. Padmini Ray Murray**

Founder, Design Beku

Dr. Padmini Ray Murray received her PhD from Edinburgh University. Her research-led practice focuses on challenging acts of infrastructural and algorithmic violence, and creating alternative digital spaces and imaginations that are grounded in feminist values, particularly an ethics of care. To explore the possibilities of manifesting these spaces, Padmini founded a design and digital collective called Design Beku in 2018. This collective aims to dismantle expectations created by market-driven notions of design by following design justice principles, that advocate designing with communities. She established the first degree-level digital humanities programme in India at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology where she was course director from 2016-2018.

Dr. Murray was the recipient of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Unbox Fellowship and the co-investigator with Claire Squires on *The Book Unbound*, also funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. She has also been a co-investigator on *Gendering the Smart City* with Professor Ayona Dutta, and the digital lead on *Two Centuries of Indian Print*, a project in collaboration with the British Library and Jadavpur University. She served as a trustee for Wikimedia UK from 2013-2014, and is one of eight ESRC Digital Good Fellows for 2025. Padmini's published work focuses on how corporate online space commits and perpetuates epistemological violence against the marginalised, through collusions of infrastructure and the interface.

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**Invited Talks**

## **Video Games as Digital Popular Culture: Intersections of Consumption, Representation, Identity and Cultural Heritage in South Asia**

Dr. Xenia Zeiler,  
Professor of South Asian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities,  
University of Helsinki, Finland.

Video Games are a significant part of present-day digital pop culture, and as such, they are influential far beyond persons actively playing games. For example, visual and narrative representations in games are often widely discussed and, at times, influence other media genres such as film or literary genres. Additionally, representations in games are often popularized by micro-celebrities, persons sharing gaming videos on digital platforms such as YouTube, Steam or Twitch. This keynote focuses on intersections of consumption, representation, identity and cultural heritage in South Asia. Exploring video game development as a cultural and creative industry, it discusses examples of how (and why) South Asian cultural heritage (e.g., music, dance, architecture, dress styles) is used and implemented in-game settings and how this is publicly received, discussed and related to questions of consumption and identity.

## **Digital Humanities and Archives in an Age of AI**

Dr. Maya Dodd  
Associate Professor,  
Department of Humanities and Languages, FLAME University

On the cusp of technological transformation, now more than ever, it is imperative that archives be unleashed on platforms open to the public. I aim to explore the impact of the shift from analogue to digital on the question of archival access and how it has affected concepts of custody, control, governance, and ownership. It has also been observed that in India while dealing with digital and born-digital material, most institutions do not detail the accessibility or accuracy of online data, which makes it difficult to distinguish signal from noise. How can this lead to an engaged citizenry if there is a devaluation of access to information? How can future archivists extend their skills of curation, and give context to digital data in repositories that use new technologies of manipulation in an already imminent machinic future? How can we re-think archival logic, memory, access, and control when the politics of information is manipulated by technology? What are the gaps in the ways the digital currently manages data and archival meaning? What are the challenges with digitisation of archives, and how do we face them as a civil society? To rethink archival access, and specifically archival discoverability as integral to access, is key to a more contextualised information future.

## **Infrastructuring as a Meme: Embedding the Values of Digital and Design Justice in Technology Development**

Dr. Padmini Ray Murray,  
Founder, Design Beku

While it is now widely acknowledged that digital spaces are exclusionary, efforts to prioritise their needs and contexts while designing technology are still fairly rudimentary. The discipline of human-centred design has amended these lacunae to some limited extent by the use of approaches such as participatory design – but the tendency to think of these demographics as merely users is still ubiquitous. In this talk, I will discuss how our practice at Design Beku moves away from this user-centric approach instead of imagining community members as experts in their own contexts and experiences. Drawing on examples from our work with people with disabilities as well as those who are marginalised by gender, sexuality and caste, my talk will illustrate how theoretical ideas such as intersectionality and feminist ethics might be realised in practice and execution through design strategies used in building technology and designing digital ecosystems. In the talk, I will also discuss how developments such as AI must be open to considerable intervention in order to accommodate futures that permit and ideally enable equity and how we need to rethink the very conceptual frameworks that underpin such developments in order to ensure that these innovations contribute to creating justice, rather than further marginalisation.

## **Pedaling Through the Pandemic: How Cycling Apps Redefine Urban Spaces and Solidarities**

Dr. Avishek Ray  
Associate Professor,  
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NIT Silchar

The pandemic has brought about significant changes in mobility, simultaneously heightening concerns about health and wellness while encouraging the adoption of various health apps designed to create personalized “safe spaces.” Drawing on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with leisure cyclists in Kolkata, my talk explores how app-supported cycling, initially embraced as a wellness activity during the pandemic, gives rise to unique “temporal spaces.”: hybrid spaces that blur the boundaries between digital and physical realms, shaped by locally specific data ecosystems and the creative application of *jugaad*. Within this framework, individual mobility practices foster new forms of solidarity, forming digitally mediated “networked publics” where human agency, technology, and socio-political dynamics intersect to reshape urban geographies.

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**Abstracts**

# Track 1: Social Media Influence and Micro-Celebrities

## Weaving a Brand Story: A Social Media Case Study of 'Sayali Rajadhyaksha Sarees' in the Micro-Celebrity Era

### Authors

Kavita Sahasrabudhe,  
Symbiosis Institute of Digital and Telecom Management, Symbiosis International  
(Deemed University)

Keyur Sahasrabudhe,  
Symbiosis Institute of Design, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

Sujata Joshi,  
Symbiosis Institute of Digital and Telecom Management, Symbiosis International  
(Deemed University)

### Abstract

This study examines the influence of micro-celebrity culture and digital narratives on brand success. "Sayali Rajadhyaksha Sarees" has transformed from a local venture into an innovative fashion leader through its strategic use of social media. The research explores the brand's remarkable journey over the past decade, highlighting how digital storytelling and self-presentation contributed to its success as a micro-celebrity. This success has influenced the brand's growth and audience engagement, as demonstrated through many qualitative methods, including interviews and content analysis, all contextualised within Goffman's self-presentation theory.

The study investigates how the brand utilises various platforms to craft an engaging narrative. It discusses how the digital space shapes entrepreneurial identity, supports diverse representation styles, and helps establish the brand as a micro-celebrity. Furthermore, the research offers insights into practical strategies for using social media for digital storytelling, identifying platform-specific approaches that contribute to the broader literature on social media branding, micro-celebrity culture, and digital entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the study explores how the brand reached diverse audiences by embracing cultural trends such as slow fashion and sustainability. It illustrates how micro-celebrity status and digital stories are created in the evolving digital landscape and provide meaningful advice for entrepreneurs aiming to harness the power of social media for cultural relevance and brand success.

# **From Rural Roots to Digital Fame: Exploring the Transformative Role of Mobile Storytelling in Empowerment of Rural Individuals to Micro-Celebrities**

Author

Vishesh Redhu

Bennett University, Greater Noida

## **Abstract**

The widespread adoption of mobile media in the rural domain has significantly changed the lifestyle of rural individuals. The rise in the usage of social media has transformed the media landscape, creating new avenues for mass self-communication and interaction. With cost-effective mobile technology, rural communities have gained access to the digital space. From living a normal rural life to creating digital fame for themselves, mobile storytelling has empowered rural youth, allowing them to gain visibility, fame, and a voice in the cultural sphere. This research paper aims to explore the transformative role of mobile storytelling in shaping the digital identity of rural youth, examining how it has contributed to their journey from that of a local individual to that of a micro-celebrity.

This study uses a qualitative research approach, specifically focusing on Ankit Baiyanpuria, a micro-celebrity whose rise to fame began with documenting his fitness and rural lifestyle journey through Instagram videos. He has also been recently recognised by the Prime Minister of India for his fitness videos and honoured with the “Best Health and Fitness Creator Award at the National Creator’s Awards.” By tracing his empowerment from a local individual to a micro-celebrity and eventually an internet sensation, this study highlights the potential of mobile storytelling for self-representation, empowerment, and cultural expression. This research also conducts a content analysis of the 75-day hard challenge videos Ankit posted on Instagram to identify the key storytelling elements and narrative structure that played a key role in his digital fame. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of how rural youth can leverage mobile storytelling to construct digital identities and achieve social mobility. The findings highlight the effective storytelling techniques, strategies and challenges in gaining digital fame, ultimately empowering rural youth to transition into micro-celebrities.

# **Young Faces, Big Impacts: A Systematic Review of Ethical Concerns and Mental Health Implications for Kid Influencers**

## Authors

Shruti Verma and Kavitha Iyer

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

## Abstract

The advent of digitality in India and the rise of kid influencers has instigated substantial ethical concerns and mental health discussions within both academia and the marketing industry. This paper synthesises prior research in this field, utilising a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis to dissect the ethical and mental health implications associated with kid influencers. A comprehensive search yielded a total of 470 documents from two major databases — the Web of Science (457 documents) and Scopus (13 documents). Our bibliometric analysis provides quantitative insights into the research landscape, including publication trends, authorship patterns, co-authorship networks, and key contributing countries. Keyword co-occurrence analysis further reveals the dominant themes and emerging research areas in this field, facilitating a deeper understanding of the current discourse and future research directions. Due to limited research on the topic, a few relevant newspaper articles were also added.

Bibliographic coupling revealed three major research areas of interest in this domain, which are YouTube child influencers, advertising and marketing impacts, and the physical and mental health of kid influencers. Major themes that emerged in this literature review were identity confusion, the impact of social comparison, the lack of culturally sensitive policies and child-specific protections in the South Asia region, privacy concerns, cyberbullying, and exploitation. Therefore, this paper maps out ethical concerns and mental health challenges in this burgeoning field, providing a pathway for future research that can inform policy interventions and contribute to a more ethically responsible influencer industry.



# **Micro-celebrities in North East India: Investigating the Formation of an Influencer Economy**

Author

Puwati Dutta,

Tezpur University, Assam

## **Abstract**

The development of platforms and digital infrastructures has significantly transformed content consumption patterns. The platform affordances and interfaces result in comparable templates for content creation, while the essence of the material is deeply embedded in its own culture. In recent years, there has been an increase in regional digital news outlets, aiming to serve as the primary media source for local inhabitants as well as national and global audiences for regional news. Code Freeman, a content creator based in Shillong, Meghalaya, creates content for three YouTube channels and an Instagram account, creating a social media-based digital media ecosystem within the state. 4FrontMedia, a YouTube news channel, is part of it. The primary use of the Khasi language, spoken by the local population, to create content provides the creator with a niche category, even though his content is produced as vlogs, podcasts, interviews, and Reels. The main objective is to deliver free news to the local community in their own language, where historically, the region's local populace depended on independent newspapers from the states as their principal source of news. The paper establishes the importance of the development of such digital networks within a state and the influence of creators from linguistic minority regions over their audience. The paper also addresses the precarity of the digital media outlets, which operate within a niche audience as its main consumers. It explores the questions of authenticity and relatability of the creator with the audience for the growth of the channels while navigating the issue of misinformation that has been prevalent in recent times.

# Track 2: Influencer Politics and the Politics of Influencing

## Examining the Impact of Influencers on Brand Loyalty for a Product: Focusing on Long-Term Consumer Relationships

Author  
Shanu Gupta  
MIT World Peace University, Pune

### Abstract

This research examines the impact of regional influencers on brand loyalty within the context of digital marketing, focusing on the dynamic relationships between regional influencers, consumers, and brands. As the prevalence of influencer marketing continues to rise, regional influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. This study employs a mixed methods approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with young adults who actively engage with influencer content. The findings reveal that factors such as trust, perceived authenticity, and cultural alignment of influencers significantly enhance brand loyalty, suggesting that consumers are more likely to form lasting attachments to brands endorsed by these influencers, perceiving them as credible and relatable. Furthermore, the alignment of brand values with influencer messaging cultivates deeper emotional connections, reinforcing consumer commitment.

These insights contribute to the growing body of literature on influencer marketing, providing strategic implications for brands seeking to leverage regional influencer partnerships effectively. By prioritising authentic collaborations with locals who resonate with their audience, brands can foster meaningful relationships that drive consumer loyalty. This research not only highlights the importance of influencer marketing in contemporary marketing practices but also sets the stage for future studies exploring its impact across diverse demographic and cultural contexts. The findings offer valuable guidance for marketers in navigating the complexities of digital consumer engagement, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of influencer strategies in cultivating brand loyalty in a competitive landscape.

# **The New Environmental Storytellers: Power of Narrative and Micro-Celebrities Engagement**

Authors

Vaishali Behera and Nadira Khatun  
XIM University, Odisha

Abstract

Social media influencers, with their niche followings and specific content, have become micro-celebrities that wield significant power in shaping the current environmental discourse through narratives. Minor yet influential voices, these micro-celebrities spread awareness through unique storytelling and symbolic representations. The dynamics of audience engagement on environmental issues have a deep impact on politics. These dynamics are governed by narratives through which humans make sense of their world. Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm Theory proposes storytelling as a challenge to the rudimentary logic and argumentation format of communication, as humans are inherently storytellers. The paper uses the Narrative Paradigm Theory to explore the narratives and their types around environmental concerns from the engagement between the micro-celebrities and their audiences. Such an inquiry for narrative is critical as it could lead to a better understanding of audience perception and behaviour.

The selected platform for the study is Instagram due to its high engagement and influence-oriented culture. The sampling for the study is purposive, with specific criteria for the determination of the micro-celebrities around niche topics like sustainable living, waste management, etc. The study uses data mining and topic analysis to examine the content patterns within these micro-celebrity accounts to capture recurring themes and topics. Through topic modelling, the study uncovers dominant environmental narratives and explores the subtle ways in which micro-celebrities negotiate personal narratives and activism. This research will not only contribute to the understanding of micro-celebrity culture in the digital age but also provide insight into how environmental discourse is reshaped within the broader digital ecosystem, challenging or complementing institutional narratives on ecological crises.

# **Digital Activism and Identity Representation: Manoj Jarange Patil's Role in the Maratha Reservation Movement**

Author

Angad Pralhad Taur

Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

## **Abstract**

In India's developing digital landscape, grassroots movements have advanced through social media and micro-celebrities, who have now come to dominate public discussions and political determinations. This study focuses on Maratha quota protests and online advocacy campaigns conducted by Manoj Jarange Patil, who is considered to be one of the leaders of the Maratha reservation movement in the state of Maharashtra. The ongoing agitation and series of hunger strikes have highlighted the intersection of digital activism and political culture, especially in the context of India's recent general elections.

The study adopts a case study approach and captures social media content, interactions and people's responses to Jarange Patil's activism. It analyses how Jarange, as a micro-celebrity, catalyses a mobilised Maratha caste and uses the internet to control discourses. It is worth noting that Jarange's actions affect public rage on issues, illustrating the relevance of digital activism in India's digital democracy. In response to Jarange's protest and his demand for the whole inclusion of the Maratha caste in the reservation category, leaders from the OBC community expressed their disapproval through agitation and online activism.

Apart from the above, the study goes further to report some key achievements of the struggle, including electoral consequences on the dominant political party in Maharashtra, the Mahayuti alliance's loss of some prominent seats and the issuance of few Kunbi (a recognition of Maratha as backward and agricultural caste) certificates to the community. These events illustrate the impact of using online activism in bottom-up movements, and how such movements can effect changes in the political scenario. The research findings will enhance comprehension regarding the dramatic changes associated with digital activism in creating political and social pressures in India.

# **The Post-Truth Politics and Political Memes in Perception Management of the Indian Political Leaders**

Author

Madhusmita Boruah

Bhattadev University, Bajali, Assam

## **Abstract**

The Web 2.0-facilitated memescape has become a powerful tool for political communication in an internet-driven techno-political culture. This has resulted in a paradigm shift in polarisation politics, especially in shaping public opinion and perception management of the political leaders. Polarisation in politics is an age-old practice of constructing the “other,” and the emergence of political memes has shifted this process of “othering” by creating information warfare in the digital public sphere. Using humour as an appeal, the political parties are developing memeification of socio-political issues as a new communication strategy to brand and rebrand their images in global politics.

The Indian context of using social media memes for political communication emerged during the Lok Sabha Election in 2014, as major political parties developed social media campaigns to appeal to youngsters. This study emphasises Lippman’s idea of pseudo-environment and political memes in engineering the public opinion of the voters in a democracy. In an age of algorithm-dominated public sphere where the shadow banning of certain political perspectives is the new language of political power, this study intends to understand political memes as the new age propaganda machines to construct ideological positions of the political leaders with special reference to the Lok Sabha Election, 2024. The objective of the study is to analyse the political memes shared by the two major political groups of India, viz. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC), on their official social media page during the election campaigns.

# Track 3: Digital Spaces, Identity, and Memory

## Weddings in the Digital Age: Homogenisation and the Negotiation of Social Norms

Author

Neha Rajan

Whistling Woods International, Mumbai

Abstract

Wedding aesthetics are becoming perceptibly homogenised, primarily driven by the influence of visual representations across social media, advertisements, and popular culture. As a result, digital media spaces are shaping aspirational behaviours and expectations around weddings. Framed within Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation, this paper observes the context of Indian wedding portrayals to note how images increasingly reference each other, creating a 'hyperreal' setting where the image takes precedence over reality. Since weddings are already structured by rigid cultural customs, the new mandate of visual aesthetics raises critical questions: If the image has become a determinant in the unfolding of a wedding, how do social norms insert themselves into the visual framework? How are the entrenched structures of caste, class, gender norms, or religious conventions being sustained?

This research explores the socio-cultural and political implications of the homogenised wedding aesthetic, particularly how parochial practices negotiate space for themselves within this visual order. Through a qualitative mixed-methods approach, the study analyses wedding-related content across various digital media platforms, examining recurring themes and motifs as well as the demographics to find which social strata subscribe to the recent standardised aesthetic. Apart from content analysis, interviews with key stakeholders, such as to-be-wed couples, wedding planners and photographers, provide insights into how the digital aesthetic is now altering the nature of weddings in terms of space, structure, and process. The paper thus explores how cultural conventions are being coded visually and whether the dominance of the image over reality reshapes the assertion of ritualistic norms.

# Aesthetic Representation and Digital Gaze on Instagram

Author

Abhishek Dwivedi

School of Liberal Studies and Media, UPES, Dehradun

Abstract

The term digital gaze denotes the visual culture and the algorithmically driven content of digital platforms such as Instagram that users engage with. Unlike the conventional understanding of the gaze, the digital one is one that is cultured with wit, engagement, and other visual elements offered by the algorithmic churning, where some images and stories are favoured, and others are suppressed. This gaze is directed to the users in such a way that they will want to fit into the prevailing trend, which further entrenches social class stratification and influences the portrayal of self in the digital environment. This study investigates the impact of the digital gaze of Instagram on aesthetics and identity development and how such visual aesthetics are specific to the platforms and influence the perception of self and others. Informed by Foucault's notion of the gaze, this work aims to show that the curation of posts, which is controlled by algorithms on Instagram, creates a digital apparatus that prescribes standards of beauty, authenticity, and social worth, thus reaffirming the existing social order.

The purpose is to provide a framework for the understanding of the weight of this kind of gaze on the construction of identities in an age of social media, particularly the place of aestheticism in the workings of Instagram and how it promotes certain ways of looking, living, and being. Methodologically, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative semiotic analysis. A representative sample of Instagram posts will be analysed to identify recurring visual themes that signify adherence to or deviation from the platform's aesthetic standards. Later, the intercession of semiotic analysis will investigate the aesthetics and explore what class, race, and gender-related values are inscribed within them and how they are impacting the identities of those who are at the margins and subjected to such aesthetic treatment. Recent academic inquiries suggest that Instagram's digital gaze not only curates visibility but also forces users to adopt conformist representations, which marginalise non-normative identities and perpetuate aesthetic homogenisation.

# **Cultural Disparities in Digital Voices: A Review of Cultural Orientations in Online Reviews**

Author

Pooja K

TA Pai Management Institute, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE)

## **Abstract**

The growth of online reviews in digital platforms has reshaped consumer behaviour. Online reviews, as a key element of the marketing communication mix in digital platforms, significantly influence purchasing decisions and brand evaluations. As digital platforms are evolving as spaces for free expression and exchange of products or services-related information, online reviews have transformed into more than mere transactional feedback. The online reviews represent the personal and collective identity of the consumers in the digital space. Considering this, the study reviews existing online review literature and examines how the cultural roots of the consumers influence them to present and accept online reviews, emphasising differences across Eastern and Western cultures.

The research reveals, in Eastern cultures with high collectivistic values, that online reviews reflect societal norms, trust, and a sense of subtlety. Conversely, Western societies tend to focus on individualism, highlighting the importance of being direct and expressing oneself clearly. Eastern cultures also tend to avoid extreme responses; therefore, they are less likely to provide neutral reviews compared to Western cultures. The study also highlights that Eastern culture is more interested in seeking information whereas Western culture is more prone to generate online reviews. Additionally, the study posits that despite the significance of culture in the usage and generation of online reviews, existing research is limited to a few specific countries. Therefore, the study proposes scope for future research to examine the cross-cultural interactions within the online review landscape in underrepresented countries.



# **Memeification and Political Identity: The Emergence of "Mama" in Assamese Political Discourse**

Author

Priyanka Das

Tezpur University, Assam

## **Abstract**

The digital mediascape and its various elements portray the paradigm of techno-dependent digital natives with their preferred choices through the manifestation of innovative genres of cultural production. The current emergence of meme culture exemplifies the production cycle of the new media environment. This study examines how memes facilitate the negotiation of cultural practices since they allow for a dynamic interaction between local and global influences as well as within tradition and modernity. This study explores the role of memes in shaping cultural practices and political identities in the digital age, focusing on Assam's Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, affectionately known as "Mama". By employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates cultural studies, linguistics, and visual communication, this research investigates how memes serve as tools for cultural production and political discourse.

Through a qualitative analysis of a number of Assamese memes featuring "Mama", the study examines their visual and textual interpretations, highlighting how these digital artefacts contribute to the construction and dissemination of political identities. The findings reveal that memes are not merely humorous content; they play a significant role in shaping public perception and fostering political engagement among digital natives. By facilitating a participatory culture, memes allow individuals to engage with and critique political figures, bridging the gap between grassroots sentiments and mainstream narratives. Ultimately, this research underscores the significance of meme culture in understanding contemporary political landscapes, including digital interactions that redefine political communication and cultural identity, particularly in the context of Assam.

## Track 4: Online Narratives and Political Identities

### Subverting or Complimenting? Analyzing the News Influencer's Impact on Normative Journalistic Identities and Practices

Author

Kabir Upmanyu

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

#### Abstract

The news landscape in India, like in many other contexts, is now populated by a multitude of content creators, curators and analysts operating across different social media platforms, discussing contemporary happenings and telling stories of journalistic value. Such 'para-journalists' have amassed thousands, if not lakhs, of followers and several of them have not had any prior journalistic training or experience in established institutionalised newsroom settings. By undertaking a series of exploratory, semi-structured, qualitative, in-depth interviews with these 'news influencers', this study will seek to analyse whether they are functioning from a place of subversion, actively challenging the established journalistic norms, values and practices that are associated with typical newsrooms.

It will also delve into the ethical concerns and dilemmas that they have, how their points of reference for what is ethical and what does not differ from those of typical journalists, and how they define their motives for undertaking the work that they do. By doing so, the study will also address the question of who a journalist is today — a term that has constantly sought to be redefined by various scholars in an ever-evolving digital context. The study will be expected to build upon the concept of "liquid journalism", characterised by openness, flexibility and no clear boundaries as far as the role, practices and identities of journalists are concerned. Lastly, it will attempt to fill in the lacunae of academic work on 'news influencers' in the Indian context. Research on digital journalistic startups in India has characterised them as being engaged in the process of "field repair." However, the growth of journalistic content creators and curators in the last few years, marked by new entrants to the field as well as rising engagement metrics, makes research on their practices and identities imperative.

# **A Comparative Analysis of Press Freedoms of SAARC Nations (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan)**

Author  
Nirmit Garg  
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## **Abstract**

Journalism is a ubiquitous tool; it churns up the country's media's fuel. Freedom, journalism, and censorship have relations like solids, liquids, and gases. Not many research papers have been published on media laws and ethics, censorship, or safeguarding journalists. This research is based on 'journalism rights', similar to human rights.

This paper examines the code of conduct and the complex and hierarchical structure that acts as a biased monopoly in the country's media system. The world's fastest-growing economy, India, is a focal point of corruption in journalism due to many incidents. Hence, the paper also deciphers the imaginary factors taken into consideration by the media organisation Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists. Also, the freedoms and the state of opinions and journalism in SAARC countries are deciphered. The journalism rights include the correlation of French principles of liberte, egalite, and fraternity (Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity), and the Constitutional laws of each country. It also implores the reasons for the continuous decline of India in the Press Freedom Index and why Nordic countries are hotspots of high rankings in the Press Freedom Index. Also, a detailed survey of the comparative policies by the governments of these respective countries is taken into consideration, which includes the opinions of approximately 20 citizens of these countries, including Non-Resident Indians residing in these countries. Since India is often termed the 'mother of democracy,' the study emphasises the truth and reality of this statement in today's world along with the quote, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." "Journalism is a method of diverse opinions; it is not only a 360-degree dominion."

# **Digital Democracy: Usability and Accessibility of Election Commission of India Websites**

## Authors

Varnikha Shekar and Meljo Thomas Karakunnel  
Christ University, Bengaluru

## Abstract

With a population of 1.45 billion (October 2024), India is the largest democracy, holding the largest democratic electoral exercise in the world. Election Commission websites in India, including those of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SECs), play a crucial role in maintaining a transparent, fair, and efficient electoral process. By enabling direct access to election-related information and complaint mechanisms, these websites empower citizens and candidates to promote transparency in governance. Governments must take note of the user experience of these digital platforms. By prioritising citizen engagement and fostering the usability of digital government services, effective web design plays a pivotal role in facilitating democratic participation and enhancing governmental accountability. The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is used as a theoretical framework to analyse the usability and accessibility of these websites, especially focusing on the 'facilitating conditions' aspect to identify the factors influencing user acceptance and usage of government websites.

The study evaluates the election commission websites of 28 Indian states and 8 Union Territories, focusing on their usability and accessibility. This evaluation is based on performance reports generated by WAVE and GTmetrix. The quantitative analysis of collected data is complemented by qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive assessment of the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) developed Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and the POUR principles. This study extends the ongoing dialogue on digital inclusion and equitable access to public services, offering practical insights for policymakers, web developers, and other stakeholders involved in e-governance initiatives. The findings highlight actionable recommendations for enhancing website design and functionality, addressing key areas for improvement in usability and accessibility.

# **The Meme Story: Impact of Humour on Explicit and Implicit Memory, the Moderating Role of Information Processing**

Author

Anshuman Mohanty

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the effects of various types of humour — comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness, and surprise—on explicit and implicit memory, with a particular focus on the moderating role of information processing. While humour has been widely acknowledged for its cognitive and emotional benefits, its differential impact on memory retention remains underexplored. Preliminary results indicate that certain humour types, particularly exaggeration and surprise, significantly enhance explicit memory recall, whereas silliness and puns showed more pronounced effects on implicit memory. Utilising an experimental approach, participants would be exposed to a series of humour-based stimuli (memes) across various categories. Explicit memory would be assessed through recall tasks, while implicit memory would be measured via recognition and reaction time tests.

The researcher has a specific interest in the role of information processing as it would be interesting to explore which type of humour leads to 'conceptual processing' versus 'perceptual processing'. Existing research suggests that 'conceptual processing' would lead to stronger explicit memory and 'data-driven processing' would be more prominent and lead to stronger implicit memory. Theoretically, this study would add to the literature as this would be one of the first studies to investigate the linkage of humour between types of information processing and humour. From a managerial perspective, this research can guide marketers in creating more effective campaigns that leverage humour to improve memory retention, engagement, and, ultimately, consumer behaviour.

# Track 5: Media and Democratic Participation

## **Weaving a Cocoon of Relatability: A Critical Analysis of Persuasion Techniques in India's Most Viewed Stand-up Humour on YouTube**

Author

Rana Bedi

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### Abstract

Stand-up comedies as digital narratives are proliferating on online platforms. Video-streaming platforms like YouTube are its biggest benefactor. This paper focuses on two components within the scholarly field of Persuasive Communication. The first part examines the performative art of stand-up comedy through the lens of Persuasive Communication. Underlying these performances is the effectiveness of using comedy in present times to persuade the masses. A qualitative critical analysis of such comedies presents a comparison between the performative act, its structure and effects, and the understanding of communication scholars towards the foundations and principles of Persuasive Communication.

Communication intended by the 'persuader'/ stand-up comedian and effects on the 'persuadee'/ stand-up audience is also exemplified. The second part of this work is an exposition of persuasion techniques regularly deployed by stand-up comedians. This is brought forth by unravelling the "most viewed Indian stand-up comedies" on YouTube. Thus, this paper works as an interesting combination of both a theoretical exploration of stand-up comedies and a practical or applied understanding of the comedy genre as experienced through the persuasion techniques used. It also celebrates stand-up comedians as micro-celebrities on YouTube who have incrementally shot to fame through utilising techniques of persuasion

# **Empowering Voices: The Role of Digital Literacy in Enhancing Democratic Participation for Women in India's Diverse Socio-economic Landscape**

Author

Nirupama Patwardhan

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the digital literacy landscape for women in India and explore its implications for democratic participation, given the extremely diverse socio-economic backgrounds, geographic locations, educational backgrounds, and family dynamics that women come from. India's rapid digital expansion presents a paradox: while access to digital technologies has increased, the digital divide remains stark, particularly for women from marginalised communities. It has been seen through multiple research studies conducted both at the national and international levels that digital literacy among Indian women varies widely. Rural women and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds face significant barriers, including limited internet access, restrictive cultural norms, and lack of institutional support. This digital disparity hinders their ability to fully engage in democratic processes and limits their voice in shaping policies that affect their lives.

Research has shown that the role of state and market players in digital literacy endeavours has yielded a mixed impact. Government initiatives like Digital India and market-driven mobile internet expansion have improved digital access, but they often fall short in addressing gender-specific challenges. For instance, state programs primarily focus on access to digital infrastructure, while market-driven approaches emphasise consumption patterns, largely neglecting digital skills training or digital rights awareness for women. Meanwhile, NGOs and grassroots organisations offer targeted digital literacy training, yet their reach remains limited and constrained by resource challenges. Through a multi-layered analysis, this paper highlights how unequal digital literacy levels translate into uneven democratic engagement. Women who lack digital literacy are not only excluded from accessing crucial information but also from participating in digital platforms where political discourse and civic engagement increasingly take place. To bridge this gap, the study advocates for a more inclusive digital literacy policy framework that recognises the intersectional barriers women face. By emphasising collaborative efforts among the state, market, and society, this paper argues that a more inclusive approach to digital literacy can foster equitable, democratic participation and empower women across India's social and economic spectrum.

# **Influencers at the Polls: Examining Political Parties and Engagement with Social Media Figures in Elections**

Author

Sagar Gokhale

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## **Abstract**

Social media influencers are vital in informing audiences about health, wealth, fashion, travel, lifestyle, food and so on. Some of them have increasingly taken positions on political and socially relevant topics, including climate justice and gender equality. They are different from the category of political influencers with a strong journalistic background or clear ideological stand. Political parties worldwide are approaching these 'general' influencers for opinion formation and vote mobilisation. While researchers have contributed important work on the role of influencers in political campaigns and their effectiveness in conveying political messages to specific demographics, little is known about the political parties' engagement with influencers in the Indian context. This research explores the interconnection of political parties, campaign strategists and social media influencers during the election period. It uses semi-structured interviews with the social media strategists for political parties, independent political strategists, and media influencers to showcase the process from strategy formation for social media to content creation by the influencers in the Indian context.



# Emerging Trends of Marathi Journalistic Practices in the Age of Digital Platformisation

Authors

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Abstract

The recent wave of digital transformation has markedly diversified journalistic practices, extending beyond conventional digital news outlets to include platforms such as YouTube and podcasts. Traditional journalism has been historically performing a crucial function of disseminating information, highlighting socio-political issues, and enhancing public engagement through citizen journalism. The paradigm shift from traditional journalism to digital platforms experienced the democratisation of media and facilitated the emergence of new journalistic practices, including entrepreneurial journalism. "Platformisation" has further opened new avenues for independent contributors. Nor is this phenomenon confined to mainstream or national media; rather, regional journalism is correspondingly adapting to these innovative changes in content creation and distribution and articulating their unique discourses and perspectives effectively. The active engagement of international media organisations like *BBC Marathi* in generating regional narratives reflects the ubiquitous nature of diversifying content concerns, while *Loksatta*, one of the leading Marathi print publication news organisations, has ventured into podcasting.

Furthermore, well-known journalists like Prasanna Joshi, who has contributed to prominent broadcast channels like *ABP Maza* and *Pudhari* earlier, have now launched their own YouTube channel, in collaboration with other content creators. Similarly, media outlets like *Punekar News* and *Indie Journal* are working to enhance the visibility of local voices on the digital landscape despite intense competition. They aim to bring important interventions that highlight regional perspectives and issues. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore the role of regional journalism within the contemporary media landscape, with a specific focus on regional narratives and discourses it produces. The premise of this study is grounded in the vital role of regional journalism in presenting diverse viewpoints within the public sphere. The present research employs an in-depth case study approach to examine specific journalistic practices, supplemented by comprehensive interviews with content creators and journalists engaged in using digital platforms. The study is a step towards comprehending the contributions of regional journalism to public discourse, particularly in relation to exploring how platformisation influences the prioritisation of regional issues. It will also examine the role of regional voices in enhancing understanding of societal challenges.

## Track 6: Catering to Digital Demographics

### **The Democratisation of News in India: The Rise of the “Fifth Estate” as an Alternative to the Fourth Estate**

Author

Sunil Belladi

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#### Abstract

The present media in India is ridden with a corporate perspective and not a societal perspective. One of the direct challenges to mainstream traditional media is posed by the fifth estate. The fifth estate refers to the increasing use of Information Communication Technologies powered by the Internet, wherein citizens are using it as a platform, and it is acting as an alternative to the mainstream media. The 2014 General election was dubbed the “Twitter election,” while the 2019 election was called the “WhatsApp election.” This year, election campaigning moved beyond X (the platform formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp to include YouTube and other short-video channels. As of 2023, there are about 821 million internet users, and 65% of these active internet users in India sought information and news online through available news apps and other social media platforms, predominantly from YouTube.

In order to continue their independent journalism, prominent news personalities in the broadcast channels left the media houses and started their YouTube Channels. The availability, acceptability and spread of social media as an alternative to the mainstream media in India are deliberated in the paper. The fading halo of journalism in the wake of the Fifth Estate is critically examined and evaluated in the context of democratising news. The possible impact of the Fifth Estate on the journalistic practices of the Fourth Estate is discussed. The conceptual framework informed by theories of the political economy of media is applied, and in achieving the set objectives for the study, the paper uses a case study method

# **Children in Digital Spaces: The Influence of Demographic Factors on Deepfake Vulnerabilities and Communication Interventions for Enhanced Digital Literacy**

Authors

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Manoj Deori  
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## **Abstract**

With the advancement of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology, the risks it poses to children's online safety and psychological well-being grow, especially in light of diverse demographic and socioeconomic factors. This study revolves around children of Assam and assesses their cybercrime awareness and perceived vulnerability to deepfakes. It examines how intersections of different demographic factors like rural and urban backgrounds, age, gender, caste, and parental digital literacy shape susceptibility to digital manipulation. The study is rooted in Paulo Freire's concept of critical consciousness and emphasises the importance of empowering children to critically assess digital content, as well as an informed approach to online engagement. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), followed by targeted communication interventions with around 600 students from Assam, the study reveals critical disparities in children's understanding of deepfakes and cybercrimes, influenced by demographic factors that impact their access to digital resources and their media literacy. The findings show that while many children feel a sense of vulnerability toward deepfake manipulation, their digital awareness often lacks the critical skills needed to recognise and counteract such threats. Freire's framework of critical consciousness underpins the study's call for communication strategies that equip children with skills to navigate and interrogate digital content effectively.

The study advocates for collaborative and targeted communication interventions that address demographic diversity, recommending that policymakers, educators, and caregivers develop targeted digital literacy programs tailored to children's specific backgrounds. By embedding critical consciousness into digital literacy efforts, this research aims to assess and suggest communication interventions that can potentially help children navigate digital spaces safely. These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of how demographic intersections shape children's vulnerability to cyber threats and highlight the need for policy-driven and communication-based protections in today's digital age.

# **Implications for Identity and Culture: The Use of Rural Languages and Dialects in Digital Communications**

Author

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the importance of rural languages and dialects in digital communication by focusing on the rural population's impact on creating representation and expressing culture. Using rural dialects in media highlights local issues, accessibility, improved engagement, and cultural relevance. After the evolution of the digital era, marginalised voices used various digital media platforms to represent and foster their various community issues through rural languages or dialects. In India, the rural health sector still faces numerous health issues like chronic diseases, access to healthcare, and many other environmental factors. The health of rural India plays a major role in contributing to the development of the nation in various ways, including economic productivity, social stability, sustainable development and quality of life. The usage of rural language and dialects not only helps with cultural identity but could also help the community to become more powerful. This study explores the utility of vernacular languages while representing culture and addressing their issues through quantitative and qualitative analysis.

# **Navigating the Creator Economy: Innovations in Journalistic Storytelling and Democratic Integrity in India**

## Authors

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Christ University, Bengaluru

## Abstract

As journalism integrates into the creator economy, the traditional boundaries of news production and audience engagement shift. This paper explores the role of new media technologies in reshaping journalistic storytelling and independence within the creator economy, particularly in the Indian context. Employing a critical political economy approach, this study investigates how creator-journalists navigate platform dynamics, balancing revenue generation with the ethical imperatives of journalistic integrity and democratic empowerment. Through content analysis of influential Indian creator-journalists and interviews, the study examines the tension between audience engagement and algorithm-driven visibility. Additionally, a social network analysis reveals the interaction between these creators, digital platforms, and audiences, shedding light on the evolving relationship between journalism and democracy. The findings of this study aim to illustrate how innovations in storytelling and business models enable journalists to sustain careers while preserving democratic values.

## **Track 7: Re-defining Identities on the Digital**

### **Influencing Taste Among Youth: Examining the Impact of Social Media Food Influencers on Purchase Intentions Towards International Cuisine Restaurants with Consumer Attitude and Self-Image as Mediating Variables**

Authors

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Abstract

Social media platforms are becoming pivotal channels for food marketing, especially as online food influencers shape consumer behaviour towards new dining experiences among younger audiences. This trend is widespread across India's urban centres and has extended to Semi-urban cities, where consumerism and social media influence are rising. In response, restaurants and cafes in these areas are leveraging unique strategies, particularly by adopting international cuisine themes to appeal to youth. These themed restaurants and cafés (Italian, Middle Eastern, Chinese) not only establish distinct brand identities but also draw in young customers eager for novel experiences in the crowded restaurant market. Many go beyond food, immersing customers in the culture of the cuisine's country of origin by providing experiences within and on social platforms. Social media, particularly through food influencers, has proven to be an effective tool for reaching and engaging youth. Influencers create buzz and positively shape consumer attitudes, driving purchase intentions and impacting young consumers' self-image as they associate their dining choices with cultural exploration. This study explores the impact of social media influencers on purchase intentions for international cuisine restaurants, incorporating the mediating role of consumer attitude and self-image to understand these dynamics better.

Drawing upon Source Credibility Theory, Self-Perception Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour, this research investigates how influencers' endorsements impact the purchase intentions of the youth in the lower tier city, factoring in the consumer's attitude and self-image alignment with international cuisines. The study adopts a quantitative approach, collecting data through an online survey administered to 275 social media users aged 18-39 who actively follow food influencers. The data is analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to assess the strength and direction of relationships between influencers' impact, consumer attitudes, self-image, and purchase intentions. This study suggests implications for marketers in the restaurant industry.

# **Absence of Governmental Recognition: The Plight of the Hyperlocal Digital News Media in the Backward Regions of India**

Author  
Sambit Pal  
MIT-ADT University

## **Abstract**

Digital disruptions have transformed the media landscape in numerous ways. Declining newspaper circulation, the migration of news consumers from traditional media to online platforms, diminished advertising revenues, cost-cutting by traditional media organisations, and the retrenchment of grassroots journalists have marginalised local news within centralised newsrooms based in regional or national headquarters. Local issues and voices are now appearing in the hyperlocal digital news media that has emerged in small district towns and villages across India. Grassroots journalist-entrepreneurs are using social media platforms to report on their communities, akin to community newspapers or radio stations. Their coverage promotes participatory democracy by including both community members and local administration. Despite their essential function in a pluralistic democracy, hyperlocal digital news entrepreneurs face a major challenge due to the lack of governmental recognition. Although the Indian government has implemented the policy of accreditation of digital journalists through the Press Information Bureau in 2022, some state governments continue to withhold the accreditation process for hyperlocal digital journalists. The absence of recognition frequently leads to efforts to silence their views under the guise of different government orders.

This research paper seeks to examine the consequences of the lack of government recognition of hyperlocal digital news outlets on their daily operations, the potential legal challenges or extra-governmental pressures encountered, and the strategies employed to navigate such a volatile situation while advocating for marginalised communities. This study uses qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and document analysis to answer the research questions. The outcome of the research is going to contribute to policy formulation and elucidate the significant role of hyperlocal digital news entrepreneurs in influencing India's digital media ecosystem at the grassroots level.

# **Instagram and Microcelebrities: An Analysis of Social Media Content on India's North-East Culture by Indian Cultural Influencers**

Author

Aviini Ashikho

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

## **Abstract**

This article will describe how women from the Northeastern part of India are using digital storytelling to communicate stories about their personal and professional lives through their traditional attire. The work explores the ways in which stories are weaved around the traditional clothing that is worn by them and posted, which are shared and viewed online, especially on Instagram, as well as the influence that modern media plays in promoting both individual and group fashion. By doing this, it draws attention to how these advocates of traditional clothing enable alternative models of fashion thought leadership and style to emerge in ways that are empowering and uplifting for women who are otherwise underrepresented in mainstream fashion and print media. The advocates of traditional clothing also represent a new type of online community development focused on the value of traditional clothing. Furthermore, the advocates of traditional clothing represent a new type of digital community formation centred around the appreciation of traditional fashion, which has the potential to decolonise the Eurocentric frameworks that currently govern fashion and change our understanding of the relationship between traditional fashion and feminism.



# **Digital Narratives of Culture and Heritage: A Study of Indian Cultural Influencers**

Author

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## **Abstract**

The era characterised by rapid digitalisation, ubiquity of social media platforms, and networked connectivity has provided a plethora of influencers catering to different niches. In that context, one such category of “cultural influencers” has emerged in India that is vital in promoting diversity and cultural heritage. The paper will examine how these cultural influencers leverage digital platforms, specifically Instagram, and its affordances to create content that is associated with cultural revitalisation and resurgence, primarily focusing on the revival of traditional art, folk art, festivals, and beliefs vis-à-vis India. In this paper, I will explore how such content contributes to shaping cultural identities among “netizens” by examining the content strategies and platform analytics of select cultural influencers in India. The study will also explore how the content of these cultural creators is informed by visibility, commercialisation, and monetisation of digital content. Moreover, it will also be critically explored whether such digital content plays any role in cultural sustainability. The findings of the study will shed light on the credibility, significance, and potential of cultural influencers in shaping the cultural narratives of India.

# Track 8: Marginalised Voices in Digital Spaces

## Documentary Filmmaking and Portrayal of Marginalised Communities in India

Author

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### Abstract

Documentary films have forever been influential in representing diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, including marginalised communities in India. This paper aims to critically investigate the power of the filmmaker's projection in shaping the audience's perception of these communities and how the filmmaker's perspectives may influence viewers' interpretations. The research aims to look for answers to the question of whether these audio-visual accounts are ultimately narratives of marginalised people or the filmmaker's perspective of them. The study examines the extent of romanticisation and idealisation when a filmmaker who does not belong to the community, unaware of their struggles and issues, decides to make a film about them. The paper also seeks to gauge the degree of romanticisation acceptable when representing sensitive issues of marginalised communities. The research examines how filmmakers' projection of artistic visions shapes the portrayal of characters, in our case, people from marginalised communities, influencing viewers' interpretations through the persuasive power of visual storytelling almost in a way that the filmmaker ensures that the audience feels a certain way about them. It investigates whether the filmmaker's intentions align with marginalised communities' actual experiences, contending that documentaries walk a fine line between genuine representation and naive romanticisation.

Emotional engagement can lead to oversimplified depictions of challenges and strengths. Through an in-depth analysis of documentaries concerning marginalised communities in India, made by both Indian and international filmmakers, this study aims to give an idea of how romanticisation affects a nuanced understanding of marginalised communities, perpetuating stereotypes. This work sheds light on the complexities of documentary impact on perceptions and urges responsible filmmaking practices. This research seeks to explore the intricate narrative strategies utilised in portraying marginalised communities, the inherent elements within documentaries that inadvertently fuel the idealisation of these communities and their projection in a certain way, and how international documentaries have portrayed marginalised Indian communities. This research will employ the approach of using content and narrative analysis methodologies. By dissecting narrative structures, identifying visual cues, and analysing storytelling techniques, this investigation aims to uncover underlying patterns that might contribute to the idealisation of the idea of these communities. Additionally, this dissertation will undertake an in-depth examination of the filmmakers' backgrounds, motivations, and personal perspectives to ascertain the potential impact of these factors on the narrative. Drawing from an array of scholarly works and previous research in the field, this study will explore how filmmakers' perspectives of the daily lives and activities of individuals within marginalised communities can significantly influence the way audiences perceive and interpret their experiences.

# **Amplifying the Unheard: Examining Marginalised Voices in Digital Spaces Throughout India**

Author

Anuradha Inamdar

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

## **Abstract**

The emergence of digital media has provided unparalleled opportunities for marginalised communities to communicate their experiences and connect with wider audiences. Nonetheless, these narratives remain marginalised within mainstream media, restricting their visibility and influence on the audience. This study analyses IndiaUnheard, an innovative community news initiative by Video Volunteers that empowers individuals from underprivileged groups — such as Dalits, tribal communities, and minorities — to record and disseminate untold stories from their lived realities. By integrating video journalism, SMS reporting, and social media channels, IndiaUnheard effectively links rural narratives with global audiences, establishing a robust platform for advocacy and transformation. This research study evaluates the efficacy of India in strengthening these marginalised voices, emphasising its training programs, tools, and methodologies that enable community correspondents to emerge as storytellers and promoters. It examines the socio-political implications of the content produced, including influencing local governance, enhancing healthcare access, and raising awareness about pivotal issues such as caste discrimination and gender inequality.

The study employs a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating content analysis of IndiaUnheard videos, interviews with correspondents and stakeholders, and audience feedback. Initial findings suggest that IndiaUnheard's participatory journalism model fosters grassroots activism, connects marginalised communities with global audiences, and facilitates meaningful social change. However, technological obstacles, resource constraints, and socio-political opposition persist as significant barriers. By examining IndiaUnheard's innovative framework, this study enhances the understanding of how digital tools can be utilised to empower marginalised communities, advocating for the expansion of participatory media as a mechanism for inclusion, advocacy, and justice. The findings aim to guide future initiatives that strive to enhance marginalised voices in digital arenas and bridge the rural-urban and global-local gaps.

# **Performing Pain in the Digital: Navigating Identities and Fetishising the Wound by Widows**

Authors

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Tezpur University, Assam

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the performance of widowhood on Instagram and YouTube while looking at the interplay of commodity culture, the binary of authenticity and self-representation. Further, it sheds light on the construction of identities (microcelebrities) stemming from performances of grieving adults online and its possible consequences. One of the major aims of the paper is to critique the argument that identity in the digital has become something that a person does rather than something that the person is. To do so, I have conducted an analysis of a group of widows who share their journey of grief online. The endeavour is to look at how, in such a process of navigating widowhood while broadcasting their lives over the internet, the selves become marketed, and their victimhood commodified. The sharing of vulnerabilities online has become their everyday existence as it fosters a catharsis of raw emotions. An analysis of the subjects' online activities on two social media sites (Instagram and YouTube) examines what happens to the subject's pain when it enters the digital space and emerges in multitudes of emotional communication.

Additionally, interviews were conducted to get insight into the subjects' perspectives and activities online. How does the digital presence impact them, how do they perceive their online subjectivities, what is it that social media feeds to their wounded selves so that they can keep re-asserting and reperforming their identities, etc? The paper forwards the argument that people turning to social media to share their encounters with pain become their identity as voices of grief, trauma survivors, etc. It further looks into the phenomenon of overt investment in the wound and the fetish associated with it, leading to the wound becoming identity while doing vulnerable self-representations.

# **Digital Democracy: The Marginalised Voices of Muslim Women and Their Fight for Justice**

Authors

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Abstract

Technological advancements and globalisation have changed the political landscape, making digital platforms vital spaces for civic engagement. The nexus of digital technology with democratic participation presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly for marginalised voices like that of Muslim women. Digital platforms have enhanced Muslim women's participation in questioning social norms and promoting justice. However, socio-economic inequalities impede their participation in digital spaces by restricting access to technology and digital literacy. They are also faced with unique challenges of cultural stigma and targeted trolling, which are followed by heightened surveillance and censorship that stifle dissent and lead to self-censorship, thus reducing their visibility in online democratic discourse. The Indian Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality, stating that women have equal rights to men and can participate actively in national governance.

In view of the same, this paper aims to explore the inter-relationship between digital media and democracy from the experiences of Muslim women considering amplified stereotypes and their marginalisation in digital spaces. The paper will employ a qualitative data analysis through interviews and questionnaires of 47 Muslim women, 15 Muslim men and some respondents with a legal background to understand their views on how Muslim women engage in political activism and their representation in digital narratives. The findings indicate the dual nature of digital spaces, whereby they can be effective tools for mobilisation and empowerment but can present major obstacles due to discrimination and cyberbullying, creating hostile settings that deter democratic participation. In order to elevate the marginalised voices of Muslim women, a justice-oriented framework should be established to guarantee the existence of inclusive digital spaces that promote social justice. Lastly, the paper also aims to educate politicians, activists, and academics on the voices of Muslim women in the digital sphere and acknowledge them as key agents of change in the democratic process.

# Track 9: Towards a Digital Resistance

## Storytelling as an Act of Resistance: Reading Seema Anand's Narratives on Sexuality

### Authors

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### Abstract

Seema Anand's TEDxEaling talk on The Art of Seduction (2012) brings in stories from Indian mythology as she navigates discussion on sexuality, pleasure and the woman's body. While any discussion on sex is considered taboo within the societal discourse, the only exception is given to the narratives on procreation. This further reaffirms the societal dictat that the only objective of sexual intercourse is to ensure the survival of the species. Through Anand's narrative, we witness a shift from this 'prescribed' discourse and explore not just the domain of pleasure but the domain of female pleasure. This allows the shedding of the clinical and regressive approach to a woman's body as the 'carrier' and allows a new reading of it.

The taboo around sexuality is also paradoxical when contrasted with explicit depictions of sexual themes in ancient Indian cave carvings of Ajanta, Elora and other historical sites, as well as the detailed elaboration of pleasure and sexual practices in Kamasutra. Against this backdrop, how can we examine the evolving discourse on sexuality, particularly through Seema Anand's storytelling on digital platforms? While popular magazines and newspapers often have advice columns with questions on sexuality and relationships, these would be considered inconsequential. The accessibility provided by the digital space has allowed such discussions to gain more traction. Anand's approach of bringing discussions on eroticism, sexuality and the female body by citing texts like Kamasutra in the public domain acts like a resistance to the established regressive societal norms. This paper will analyse how Anand's engagement with her audience, through incorporating ancient texts in contemporary times, allows it to become socially relevant. The present paper then intends to conduct a textual analysis of Anand's content, available on different social media platforms.

# **Media, Maratha and Movement: Role of Print and Social Media in the Maratha Reservation Agitation**

Author

Hrishikesh Nandkumar Patil

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Abstract

Within the broad spectrum of development issues in India, the intricate and deeply rooted challenge of caste emerges as both a reflection of historical inequalities and a driver of contemporary socio-political dynamics. The Maratha caste, historically depicted as a dominant group across literature, film, television, and, more recently, social media, is now advocating for a reservation quota within the public sector. Additionally, Maratha identity significantly shapes the political landscape of Maharashtra, highlighting its substantial influence on the region's socio-political fabric. This intersection between caste, development, and media presents a compelling area for scholarly inquiry, as media shapes public perceptions of development issues. This paper delves into the interplay between media and social movements, focusing on the agitation of the Maratha reservation in the Sangli district of Maharashtra, India. The study adopts a revised mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with key stakeholders — including activists, journalists, and social media content creators — with an extensive social media discourse analysis.

By analysing social media narratives surrounding the Maratha reservation issue, the study examines how digital platforms amplify or reshape community perceptions, mobilise supporters, and create solidarity. The qualitative interviews with core members of the Maratha Kranti Morcha reveal insights into the historical context of the reservation demand, the evolution of mobilisation strategies, and the use of both traditional and digital media platforms. This research highlights the pivotal role of traditional events and grassroots efforts alongside the strategic crafting of digital content, which plays a crucial role in framing community narratives and rallying supporters. Journalist interviews further expose newsroom dynamics, particularly regarding caste representation and editorial policies, which influence public narratives on reservations. This paper examines the media's role in the Maratha reservation movement, offering insights into how traditional and digital platforms shape narratives, leadership impact, and community mobilisation, ultimately strengthening community bonds in contemporary social movements.

## **Locating the Adivasis in Digital Media: Media Marginalisation and Their Narratives of Resistance**

Authors

Manoj Deori

Central University of Hyderabad

Ashes Nayak

Fakir Mohan University, Odisha

### **Abstract**

On 9th August 2018, on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a few representatives of India's tribal communities, also referred to as Adivasi/Indigenous organised a press conference in New Delhi. To their utter disappointment, not a single mainstream media outlet turned up for the press conference, which is a strong case of media apathy towards the issues of the Indigenous communities/Adivasis in India and their marginalisation in the narratives of national media/imagination. Adivasis are the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, constituting a significant portion of India's total population. According to a 2011 census report, 8.6 per cent of the Indian population is Adivasis. Despite their numbers and contributions towards the nation in terms of their rich cultural heritage and ethnic attributes such as language, literature, art, and folklore, their presence in the digital space appears insignificant, and Adivasis are often marginalised in the digital space in India.

At the same time, the rise of digital media, as part of the digital revolution, in terms of improved digital ecosystem and digital media reach, has resulted in the formation of alternative space/locations of representation in contravention to the conventional narratives of the mainstream media that often marginalises the Indigenous communities. In this indecisive condition, the research paper is an attempt to understand and locate the Adivasis in the media space, which is increasingly becoming digitalised and personalised in terms of content and patterns of consumption. With the help of a content analysis of a few selected YouTube channels of Adivasi communities and personal interviews of the Indigenous vloggers/influencers, the paper intends to explore the voices of Adivasi communities in constructing alternative narratives for representational justice and asserting their Indigenous identities.



# **Algorithmic Visibility and the Subaltern: Examining TikTok's Ban and Its Impact on Marginalised Creators in India**

Author

Pawan Sharma

University of Minnesota Twin Cities

## **Abstract**

This paper examines TikTok's role as a cultural and political platform amid geopolitical tensions between India and China, focusing on its impact on media equity, creative labour, digital sovereignty, and national identity. During China's 2022 COVID-19 zero-lockdowns, TikTok users repurposed the Hindi song "Jimmy Jimmy Aaja Aaja" from the film *Disco Dancer* (1982) as a protest anthem. This act showcases deep-rooted cultural exchanges that transcend political boundaries. Conversely, on the Indian side, this study analyses the implications of India's 2020 TikTok ban on marginalised communities who relied on the platform for visibility and economic opportunity, highlighting how the ban exacerbated digital divides and underscored the precariousness of creative labour in the platform economy. By situating TikTok within theories of media ecology (its impact on digital environments), platform capitalism (creative labour and economic structures), and digital nationalism (the shaping of national identity), the research explores how the platform reshaped cultural capital, challenged existing socio-economic hierarchies, and reflects broader anxieties about algorithmic governance and sovereignty.

# Track 10: Rethinking Citizenship Through Media Literacy

## The Role of YouTube Influencers in Enabling Greater Political Participation and Democracy

Author

Naresh Rao H

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Abstract

Political participation is an important driver of democracy. In countries like India, the vast majority of the voters vote in elections but otherwise are disconnected from the political process. The United States of America may present a contrast in terms of political choices available to the masses, but there is a high amount of political participation due to party affiliation. This has been evolving in India recently, along with the political polarisation like in other democracies. Digital media can enable a digital public sphere, resulting in greater public participation in public issues. Digital media influencers are exerting their influence over politics worldwide, and in India, the recent 2024 Parliamentary election is known as a YouTube-driven election. There has been a perceptible shift from the influence of traditional news media and journalists to digital media and social media influencers in recent years, with young voters turning to influencers for political insights.

The role played by influencers like Dhruv Rathee and Akash Banerjee in informing, motivating, and influencing voters to think critically before voting has caught the imagination of researchers. These influencers are replacing powerful journalists from mainstream media who have sway over millions of Indians. Younger voters are increasingly turning to YouTube to understand politics and vote in elections. The ability of influencers to engage with their followers through YouTube provides a fascinating opportunity for them to delve into the emerging public sphere. The paper will try to study the extent to which influencers enable greater political participation and democratise the political sphere in the process. A survey among the young voters will be undertaken to validate the influence of political influencers on actual voters, to what extent and how.

# **Fashion Journalism in India: A Study of Domain Expertise Among Journalists and Expert Expectations from Them**

Authors

Shambhu Sahu,

Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

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Pompy Paul

National Institute of Fashion Technology, Kolkata

Abstract

Fashion journalism, including niche fashion magazines, has helped in shaping the discourse around fashion in India. In fact, it has evolved into a multifaceted and influential domain, and the role of fashion journalists has become increasingly crucial in shaping public perceptions and fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between fashion, culture, and societal trends in a democracy. Scholars have noted that Indian fashion journalists must navigate a complex landscape of traditional crafts and modern trends, often blending the two to create a distinct fashion narrative. It is in this context that this study examines fashion journalism in India from the twin perspectives of experts and journalists, with an aim to understand factors impacting domain competence among fashion journalists in India. Domain expertise is the special knowledge, skills, and insights that professionals possess in a certain industry or subject matter.

This study examines the concept of domain knowledge among Indian fashion journalists, contributing to the scholarly understanding of fashion journalism as a profession. It also offers helpful information for academics, industry stakeholders, and media professionals who want to raise the standard and prominence of fashion journalism in India. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to improve our understanding of the complex connections that exist in the Indian media landscape between fashion, journalism, and expertise. This exploratory qualitative study – based on in-depth interviews with fashion industry experts and fashion-cum-lifestyle journalists – tries to study the education and training of fashion journalists, the impact of socio-cultural elements on journalistic practices, the role of industry networks and affiliations in forming expertise, and the dynamics of audience reception and engagement with fashion journalism content, including digital. It also seeks to understand if celebrity weddings help the fashion industry and journalism.

# **Dissenting Voices Through Collaborative Journalism in the Digital Era: A Study of Ravish Kumar Official**

Author

Agnitra Ghosh

Kamla Nehru College, University of Delhi

## **Abstract**

In the last few years, there has been noteworthy momentum in the works of digital political commentators/ journalists and online news portals in India, often articulating oppositional viewpoints against corporate-controlled mainstream media. The spirit of collaboration between different platforms and individual creators significantly enhances the energies in the digital media sphere. Beyond formal collaborations between online media organisations, popular journalists and YouTubers often bring in the works of relatively smaller online news portals and digital content creators as critical additions to their own reportage and commentary. Drawing from Sarah Stonbely's writings on "collaborative journalism", this paper examines the promise of cooperative works in the sphere of new media. Focusing specifically on the YouTube channel of noted journalist Ravish Kumar (Ravish Kumar Official), I would like to map how alternative voices are amplified because of the collaborative spirit in content production, presenting a serious challenge to the legacy media. Further, the energy of collaboration can stimulate journalistic works, even through cooperation between audiences and YouTube journalists. While collaborative journalism is surely a promising development, one can't possibly ignore the pressures to fit into the new media logic and concerns about voices from marginalised communities. In spite of these genuine questions, collaborative media content production is a significant framework for understanding contemporary media instead of only focusing on charismatic digital commentators.

# **The Digital Divide in the Age of E-Government: Barriers to Participation in Civic Processes**

## Authors

Swetabh and Shivam Ballewar

Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

## Abstract

The growing reliance on digital platforms for government services and civic engagement has the potential to alienate vulnerable people due to the continuing digital gap. This study investigates “The Digital Divide in the Age of E-Government: Barriers to Participation in Civic Processes,” focusing on Maharashtra’s underprivileged groups. Based on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Digital Divide Theory, the study investigates how uneven adoption of e-government platforms leads to differences in civic involvement. Furthermore, utilising the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study examines the motives and barriers different demographic groups have when accessing e-government services. This study uses a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews with representatives of marginalised communities, government officials, and digital literacy educators provide in-depth insights into citizens’ difficulties. The quantitative phase includes a purposive sampling of 300 individuals from underprivileged communities in rural and semi-urban Maharashtra to gather various experiences with digital exclusion and civic engagement. The study concludes with policy proposals to improve digital inclusion, increase access to government services, and create more equal venues for civic involvement. The report emphasises the importance of bridging the digital divide to create a more inclusive democracy in Maharashtra.

# Track 11: Understanding Digital Leisure

## Indian Video Games as Medium of Literacy: Decoding Indian Socio-Cultural Realities

Author

Rajat Bandopadhyay

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication (SCMC), Symbiosis International  
(Deemed University)

### Abstract

This study explores the emerging role of Indian video games as sites of cultural education and socio-political critique. By focusing on three acclaimed games—Asura, Missing: The Complete Saga, and Raji: An Ancient Epic—this research aims to analyze how these digital narratives respond to important matters in Indian society. Asura is made of parts of Indian mythology where the demon is the leading character fighting against gods in the story, reflecting the struggle between power and evil alongside Right and Wrong. Failing to address gender violence and human trafficking, Missing: The Complete Saga, the game educates players about the struggle women face in India increasing empathy. Similarly, in Raji: An Ancient Epic, the author uses characters and elements from Indian legends and mythology to present the power of femininity and the part of women as protectors of culture and family values. In this article, the author employs a descriptive case study and a secondary data analysis using the sentimental analysis approach to explore these games' thematic richness, semiotic meanings, and narrative interactivity to argue about their capacity to promote socio-cultural understanding and learning. Such conclusions prove the expanded relevance of video games as powerful tools of reflective and disruptive narratives and critical discursive practices.

# **Digital Leisure in Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Study among the Tea Tribe Community in Cachar District in Assam**

Authors

Subhadeep Dutta and SM Alfarid Hussain  
Assam University

## **Abstract**

Digital leisure can be broadly defined as the specific usage of digital tools and platforms for entertainment purposes. Leisure patterns have gone through significant changes, from their co-existence with labour to the acceptance of the Internet as a leisure space. ICTs have changed the relationship between labour and leisure. The tea tribe community of Assam constitutes around 20% of the state's total population. However, this community continues to suffer marginalisation in aspects related to health, education and other socio-economic indicators. The aim of this paper is to study and analyse the 'Digital Leisure' practices among the tea tribe community of Assam. The researcher has carried out an ethnographic study among the members of the Labac Tea Estate in the Cachar district of Assam.

The study reinforces previous findings that emphasised the relevance of everyday ICT use for development research, even if it is largely driven by the quest for leisure (Rangaswamy and Arora, 2018). The participants of the study further revealed that the experience of consuming digital leisure contributes to the creation and assertion of their distinct socio-cultural and political identity. This phenomenon, which we can term digital capital accumulation, is gradually gaining ground in the tea gardens of Assam. In the present study, 30 individuals' narratives have been explored to study the impact of digital leisure practices on the everyday lives of those who belong to the tea tribes of Assam.

# **The Digital Transformation of Social Dancing: A Cultural Analysis of Virtual Dance Communities in the Post-Pandemic Era**

Author

Prathamesh Kamble

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic provoked a significant transformation in social activities, with social dancing among those forced to adapt to digital platforms. Traditionally, social dancing has been a physical, in-person activity that fosters community, cultural exchange, and embodied interactions. However, the global health crisis necessitated a shift from these physical spaces to virtual environments, giving rise to online dance communities. This study seeks to explore and analyse the cultural implications of this transition, focusing specifically on the experiences of Salsa, Bachata, and Kizomba dancers within virtual spaces. A pilot study was conducted involving a sample size of 50 participants, and it delves into the altered dynamics of social dancing as it moved from physical venues to digital platforms such as Zoom and other online forums. The research addresses key questions about the transformation of social dancing: how the absence of physical presence has impacted the sensory and embodied experiences of dancers; the ways in which virtual dance communities have either preserved or adapted traditional cultural practices; and the implications of this digital shift on the inclusivity and accessibility of social dancing. Additionally, it investigates how these communities maintain a sense of belonging and cultural continuity despite the lack of physical interaction. By employing digital ethnographic research and focused group discussions, this study offers insights into the adaptability of social dance communities in the face of challenges.

In this study, a significant portion of participants expressed dissatisfaction with virtual dance classes conducted through platforms like Zoom and Google Meet, highlighting that these did not foster an effective learning environment. The physical aspects of social dancing, such as partner rotations and the spontaneity of in-person interactions, were notably absent online, diminishing the sense of community and cultural engagement. Additionally, the requirement to have a partner at home posed challenges, particularly in partnered dances like Salsa and Bachata. Most participants from the Mumbai region, where most of the study was conducted, were skeptical about the sustainability of virtual dance communities, preferring in-person classes for a more authentic and enriching experience.



# **Digital Democracies and Gendered Aesthetics: Examining Social Media Influence and Wearable Technology on Cultural Identity and Consumer Behaviour Among New Adults in South Asia**

Author

Anwasha Banerjee and Bhavana S,  
Christ University, Bengaluru

Abstract

In the dynamically evolving landscape of South Asia, social media and wearable technology have emerged as influential forces in shaping the cultural identities and consumer behaviours of “new adults” aged 19-25. This study explores the complex intersections between digital platforms, aesthetic design, and consumer perceptions within this demographic, focusing on how gender influences attitudes toward wearable technology. Utilising a comprehensive survey of a representative sample, this research examines the impact of design aesthetics on perceived utilitarian and hedonic value, with gender as a moderating factor. Preliminary findings indicate that male participants demonstrate a stronger response to the utilitarian aspects of wearable aesthetics, such as functionality and practicality, while gender differences in hedonic value, encompassing pleasure and emotional responses to design, are more nuanced across the demographic. Additionally, the study highlights social media’s significant role in amplifying cultural expression and shaping consumer trends among new adults.

By providing platforms for individual identity formation and collective cultural narratives, social media not only increases the visibility of diverse cultural expressions but also influences purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how design, digital influence, and cultural identity interact to shape consumer behaviour among new adults in South Asia. By uncovering distinct preferences and behaviours influenced by gender and aesthetics, the findings offer valuable insights for brands seeking to connect meaningfully with this dynamic, digitally engaged audience, ultimately informing targeted marketing strategies and product development efforts in a culturally rich and diverse market.

# Track 12: Digital Agendas and the Media Space

## Digital Muscle: Brahmin Pride, Patriarchy, and Resistance in India's Twitter Controversy

Author

Shamika Dixit and Swikrita Dowerah,  
Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

### Abstract

In the digital age, social media platforms have become pivotal spaces for the negotiation and contestation of identity, power, and cultural discourse. In August 2024, a Bengaluru-based female CEO Anuradha Tiwari posted a photo on X, flexing her muscles with the hashtag #BrahminGenes. This sparked a nationwide caste-based debate over so-called caste supremacy and a claim over symbolic power. This paper investigates the techno-cultural discourse surrounding this controversy on X (Twitter). The above post received polarised responses on the platform, with some users celebrating Brahmin identity while others critiquing the inherent tendencies of Brahminical patriarchy in Indian society. Three core themes emerge from the critical discourse analysis performed on the 200 tweets mentioning the hashtag #BrahminGenes. The first theme 'Merit Mythos' explains the framing of Brahmin identity as inherently meritocratic, the second theme, 'Pride versus. Prejudice' demonstrates the historical hierarchies linked to caste oppression, and the third theme, 'Unity in Division' highlights the discourse around a call for Hindu solidarity that contrasts with intra-religious caste divides.

This study illuminates the complexities of caste identity in digital spaces, revealing the interwoven narratives of caste, merit, and religious unity within Indian social media. The findings contribute to understanding how digital platforms mediate and amplify caste discourse, reflecting and shaping contemporary socio-political dynamics in India.

## **(Re)-Defining Masculinities in Neoliberal India: A Study on YouTube Content Creators and Their Narratives**

Author

Swapna Gopinath, Abhishek Roy, and Divyani Dubey,  
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Abstract

India's digital spaces are populated by content of varied forms with multifarious themes, reflecting the unique cultural and political scenes after the surge in neoliberal normative patterns in the lives of its citizens. A significant development in content creation picks the thread of influencers like Andrew Tate, who endorses and celebrates a form of hypermasculinity that builds on the idea of gender binaries, foregrounds the concept of 'trad-wives' as complementary to the toxic masculine identity that is the desirable one. This paper explores the idea of hypermasculinity that influencers like Elvish Yadav eulogise on their YouTube channels, which have millions of subscribers nationwide. Their content becomes appealing for multiple reasons, and the informative content, although often appropriated and misrepresented, is one of the reasons.

The paper will scrutinise the content created by four select male influencers: Sarthak Goel, Chadtag, The Skindoctor, and Elvish Yadav. Their content will be studied using the framework of masculinity studies and feminist media theories, and they will be placed against the hegemonic nationalist paradigms to study the dynamic connections between the corporeality of the citizen and the gender relations that are acknowledged and appreciated within the national discursive patterns. The research methodology used for this study will be Semiotic Analysis and Discourse Analysis, where select videos of the four influencers will be closely examined using Semiotic Analysis. The codes will then be contextualised using Discourse Analysis and findings presented within contemporary Indian social formations.

## Digital Darshana: Mapping a “Mediation” of Boundaries Between the Profound and the Profane

Author

Debarghya Sanyal,

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International ((Deemed University)

### Abstract

The screen has long been a medium for viewing gods and deities across cultures. Among Indian followers of the Hindu religion, this viewership has also, in several instances, evolved into an occasion of ritualised view-worship or darshana. The stories of garlanded TV sets and elaborate pujas before the airing of Ramanand Sagar’s 1986 TV series *Ramayana* have themselves been much mythologised in popular media. Over the years, while the number of serialised mythological TV narratives has increased, the onus of this ritualised darshana has, however, shifted away to smaller screens — initially the handheld CDMA cell phones and, more recently, to the smartphones. These handheld screens provide frequent and easy access to written mantras, hymns, and prayers, as well as the images of gods and goddesses. Nonetheless, these same devices also host — with comparable if not equal ease and frequency — videos of non-vegetarian food recipes otherwise prohibited in spaces of devotion, pornographic videos, visual and verbal texts with cuss words, and other forms of linguistic usage that are often deemed “profane” and otherwise unfit for any proximity with religious and/or holy practices.

This paper will draw on the works of Madhava Prasad, Kajri Jain, and Wendy Chun to explore how consumption habits on digital media have redefined how Indians distinguish between the “profane” and the “holy” in their daily media usage. Through a close reading of web browser templates, website designs, and streaming platforms, I will explain how their content curation approaches reinforce neoliberal interpretations of religious beliefs in “sin,” “impropriety,” “purity,” and “holiness.” Based on these close readings, the paper will ultimately attempt to study the phenomenon of “digital darshana” as an economic tool for the constant production and re-production of a religion-based market economy.

# **Navigating Caste and Gender in Digital Spaces: Marathi-Speaking Women Writers and the Dynamics of Facebook in India**

Author

Neha Ghatpande,

St Mira's College for Girls, Savitribai Phule Pune University

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the intersections of caste and gender as experienced by Marathi-speaking women Facebook users from marginalised communities and those facing marginality based on their ideologies, politics, and life choices. Focusing on the experiences of women writers, it examines how these users engage with mainstream discourse, leveraging Facebook to reflect on identity, caste politics, and gendered narratives. Using digital ethnography, interviews, and literature review, the research situates these narratives within the broader Asian media landscape, where regional languages like Marathi play a crucial role in India's tradition of public discourse. The paper underscores how Facebook serves as a dual space of empowerment and vulnerability for marginalised women, offering visibility while exposing them to gendered challenges such as online harassment, self-censorship, algorithmic bias, and surveillance.

Marathi women writers utilise Facebook not only to assert identities shaped by caste and gender but also to navigate and contest societal expectations of womanhood and caste-based roles. Yet, they face significant challenges in achieving visibility, as English and mainstream digital discourses often dominate, furthering the regional invisibility of their voices. This study highlights the heterogeneity of regional spaces, reflecting a spectrum of gendered and caste-based experiences in the digital sphere. By connecting these localised narratives to global discussions on digital precarity, this paper reveals the paradox of social media platforms: they amplify marginalised women's voices while entangling them in structural inequalities. Situating the experiences of Marathi-speaking women within global contexts, the research emphasises the transformative potential of regional languages and digital spaces in forming distinct, gender-conscious spheres of influence, fostering dialogues on social hierarchy, representation, and the politics of visibility in digital media.

# Track 13: Catering to Digital Demographics

## The Transformative Impact of Digital Cinematography on the Art and Aesthetics of Filmmaking: Beyond Digital Flexibility

Author

Sanjay Surin,

Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

### Abstract

This research paper examines the transformative impact of digital cinematography on the art and aesthetics of filmmaking, emphasising the complexities and challenges that arise from this evolution. It investigates how the transition from analogue to digital technology has redefined traditional aesthetic values, altering both production techniques and viewer experiences. Central to this inquiry is the concept of cinematographic aesthetics, which bridges the artistic object and spectator perception, revealing the tension between technological innovation and the emotional resonance of traditional film. The paper highlights the implications of digital flexibility, particularly concerning retakes and post-production processes, which, while offering creative control, can undermine artistic integrity and authenticity. It discusses the potential loss of spontaneity in performances due to reliance on digital alterations and raises critical questions about authorship and the representation of a filmmaker's vision. Also, the research addresses the increasing dependence on post-production, which introduces challenges related to time management and budget constraints. This dependency neglects the perfection in mise-en-scene, production design and cinematographic aspects. Ultimately, the paper posits that while digital cinematography fosters unprecedented artistic opportunities, it also necessitates careful navigation of the interplay between technology and art, prompting further discourse on authenticity, emotional engagement, and the future of cinematic storytelling.

# Commoning Domesticity: Contemporary Depictions of 'Housewives' in Indian Cinema on OTT

Authors

Deepthi Krishna Thota and Reetuparna Bhattacharjee  
Mahindra University, Hyderabad

Abstract

With the proliferation of OTTs, various regional language films from across the country and around the world are now accessible and popular with the availability of subtitles and audio language options. This paper uniquely centres on examining the representation of the 'housewife\*' or "homemaker" in selected Indian films from Hindi and Malayalam cinema that became popular on OTT, highlighting regional variations and commonalities in the portrayal of housewives. This cross-linguistic approach enriches the understanding of cultural and social dynamics in different parts of India, particularly in relation to the representation of housewives in Indian films on OTTs. These films, with substantial roles for women as 'housewives', captured the imagination of a wide range of audiences, which, just a few years ago, would have put them squarely in the art film category and relegated them to film festival circuits. In this context, the paper supplants the concept of 'common space' from city spaces to understand the symbolic and abstract 'commoning' of spaces made possible by internet OTT platforms. The study focuses on the following films *Tumhari Sulu* (2017, Suresh Triveni), *Thapad* (2020, Anubhav Sinha), *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021, Jeo Baby), and *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya He* (2020, Vipin Das) as these films deviate from the stereotypical depiction of Indian 'housewives' and subtly disrupt the coercive image of 'housewives.'

Through qualitative content analysis, the study explores how the depiction of 'housewives' in these films builds common spaces of dialogue and negotiation that go beyond the binary concepts of outside/inside and private/public. The paper, through examination of depictions of 'housewives,' contends that OTT platforms have the potential to challenge the constraints and subjugation of femininity within domestic and heteronormative spaces, redefine social relations and contribute to the ongoing process of building 'common spaces.' We are using housewi(ves) to indicate the common understanding of the stereotypical construction (with limited to no agency, self-abnegating whose labour at home is under or unvalued) of a married woman who stays home in many Indian families.

# **Empowering the Elderly: A Content Analysis of Anna Nagar Times' Role in Promoting Digital Literacy Among Senior Citizens in India**

Authors

Mohit Dhanjani,  
Manipal University Jaipur

## Abstract

In the digital age, proficiency with technology is increasingly essential for active participation in democratic processes and access to information. However, senior citizens often face challenges in adopting digital tools, leading to a digital divide that can marginalise them from societal discourse. This study explores the role of hyperlocal newspapers in India, specifically the Anna Nagar Times, in promoting digital literacy among the elderly.

Using content analysis methodology, the research examines articles, announcements, and features published in the Anna Nagar Times in 2023 that relate to digital literacy initiatives for senior citizens. The analysis focuses on how the newspaper communicates the availability of free mobile phone operation classes and the framing of digital literacy as a tool for empowerment. This study highlights the significant impact hyperlocal media can have on bridging the digital divide at the community level. By fostering digital literacy among senior citizens, the Anna Nagar Times contributes to enhancing democratic participation and social inclusion. The findings underscore the potential of localised media interventions in promoting digital empowerment and provide insights for policymakers, educators, and media practitioners aiming to address digital disparities.



# **Digital Narratives and Identity Formation: Creative Expressions of Kerala's Gulf Migrants on Short Video Platform**

Author

Samseer Mambra

Manipal Centre for Humanities (MAHE)

Abstract

Short videos have rapidly become a popular medium for creative expression, connecting people through relatable content that responds to trends and culturally significant events. The simplicity of short-form creation has broadened participation, allowing diverse creators to contribute actively. For migrants, short videos are a powerful tool to document their lives, share experiences with loved ones, and express emotions visually. These digital expressions not only provide connection but also serve as forms of resistance against mainstream invisibility, creating autonomous records of migrant life and journeys that challenge limited portrayals in conventional media. Using a content analysis approach, this study examines a broad selection of short videos shared by migrant creators, mapping distinct thematic patterns that capture three critical aspects of migrant life: the precarious nature of their work, expressions of separation and pain, and the interwoven themes of self-sacrifice, hope, and exploitation. These videos serve as more than mere entertainment; they act as powerful vessels for emotional expression, cultural identity, and social connection. Through humorous skits, emotional vlogs, and collaborative performances, migrants creatively utilise the affordances of short video platforms to navigate the boundaries of public and private life, reinforcing ties with their transnational families and building niche online communities.

This paper argues that short video platforms provide Kerala's Gulf migrants with powerful tools to reshape their identities, establish community visibility, and engage with audiences beyond the traditional limits of migrant narratives. Through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, migrants are not merely users but active creators who employ humour, storytelling, and collaborative content to navigate and share their migrant experiences. These digital expressions challenge mainstream depictions of migrant lives by presenting complex, multi-dimensional narratives that include the struggles and emotional costs of migration and themes of resilience, creativity, and communal connection.

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Ayantika Goswami  
Felisha Bhattacharjee  
Ira Tadvalkar  
Ananya Ganotra

### Social Media, Publicity & Printing Committee

Rajat Bandopadhyay  
Dr. Anshuman Mohanty  
Megha Mhaske  
Bharat Jadhav  
Vishal Jokare  
Tanvi Wankhede  
Malini Bhosle  
Kalyan Shitre  
Darshan Sakat  
Akshara Tyagi  
Shivangi Biswas  
Sanchita Mishra  
Shalvi Parge

### Hospitality & Logistics Committee

Dr. Anshuman Mohanty  
Dr. Sagar Gokhale  
Megha Mhaske  
Vishal Jokare  
Kavita Puri  
Shilpa Daniel  
Tanvi Wankhede

### Technical Team

Hemant Ubale  
Ganesh Bhegade  
Kalyan Shitre  
Darshan Sakat

### Finance & Payment

Sanjay Lokare  
Raghavendra Patki

### Compendium Committee

Dr. Swikrita Dowerah  
Dr. Debarghya Sanyal  
Dr. Nirupama Patwardhan  
Dr. Kabir Upamanyu  
Rajat Bandopadhyay

### Stage Management

Dr. Nirupama Patwardhan  
Dr. Shamika Dixit  
Ananya Ganotra

### Administration Committee

Megha Mhaske  
Vishal Jokare  
Shilpa Daniel  
Kavita Puri  
Tanvi Wankhede  
Malini Bhosle  
Santosh G  
Rani Kamble

