

Internet Development in India and the Changing Landscape of Media: Challenges to Traditional Media

PROF.V.VINAY KRISHNA Dr.JULIE

(Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Dept of Mass Communication,
Telangana University, Nizamabad-503322, Telangana State)¹

(Assistant Professor, Dept of Mass Communication, Telangana University,
Nizamabad-503322, Telangana State)²

Abstract:

India is witnessing major shift in its media landscape. Internet is driving the major changes in the way the media produces its content and distributes it. Massive growth in internet in India is the major reason for the transformational shift in the media landscape in the country. There are issues like credibility, accuracy and authenticity related to the digital, social and new media in the country. Is there still relevance for the traditional media organisations like the print media and electronic media and there are questions about their gradual loss of ad revenues as they were sharing the ad revenues with the digital media platforms, which are relegating the print media to the third position in getting the share from the ad spends in the country. In this backdrop, this research paper presents and analyses the trends in internet growth in India and its impact on the changing landscape of the media and the challenges to the traditional media.

Keywords: Internet growth in India, landscape of media, social media and traditional media

Introduction:

With unprecedented growth and expansion in the internet connectivity and its access through the mobile phones, India has emerged as the country with second largest number of internet users in the world. India has also emerged as the largest consumer of mobile data and it accounted for almost 22 per cent of the world's mobile data.

There is an all-round robust growth in the internet and its allied sectors in the country. Tremendous improvement in the telecom infrastructure facilities and affordable mobile data plans have all worked as the drivers for the internet's amazing growth story in the country.

The mobile data that cost Rs 206 per GB in the year 2016 is got cheaper and more affordable at Rs 12 per GB in 2018.

The availability of cheaper mobile phones, especially the smart phones have ushered in the internet usage revolution and now the country is estimated to have 51.2 crore internet users (TRAI June 2018).

The NASSCOM (2016) has also predicted that the internet user growth in India to be three times the world's average. It was estimated way back in 2016 by the NASSCOM that India will witness 75 per cent of the new internet users' growth will come from rural areas leveraging the expansion of cell phone towers and affordable data rates and the increase in video content viewership.

The surge in content consumption in regional languages and the preference for videos over the text and accessing internet through mobiles have all are resulting in the changing media usage patterns in the country.

The Cisco (2018) has also predicted that India would exceed the global internet mobile users growth rate by 2023. This prediction also hints at the massive expansion of mobile data users and the internet user base in the country, which is already the second in position in terms of number of users and is next only to China.

The growth is such massive in India and it is expected that monthly active internet users will be around 600 million by the end of year 2020. The ICUBETM Report (201) has also highlighted the fact that the country's rural areas are driving the India's digital revolution. There was a 45 per cent growth in the internet penetration in the country's rural areas and this is in stark comparison of 11 per cent growth in the country's urban areas that have already reached the saturation point.

In the year 2019, there was a 264 million internet users in the rural areas of the country and it is expected to touch a good 300 million in the year 2020 (Data Insights and Consulting Company, Kantar-2019)

The Ericsson report (2019) revealed that the Indians have consumed a massive 12 GB data per month on an average in the year 2019 and the report has also predicted a whopping average of 25 GB data usage per month by Indians by the year 2025. The numbers and the data volume usage all indicate that the Indian internet users are engaged in internet based content and its use for numerous purposes. The country has only four per cent of the households having fixed internet connections, the major accessibility of internet is through the mobile phones.

The internet has also brought in unimaginable changes in the way people live, communicate, consume news and entertainment, banking, and sale and shop, and we avail services from the government and private establishments. The e-governance, e-services and e-media have all are pushing the internet growth and its usage in everyday life in the country. The rural areas are no exception for the same where the internet cafes, e-seva centres are common.

Changes in the patterns of media usage:

The unprecedented growth of internet and its massive expansion and accessing in rural areas of the country has resulted in the changing media usage patterns besides impacting the lives. It is interesting to point out that there is a huge 88 per cent penetration of 4G networks in the country.

There is a growth in the media literacy and the government of India too have envisaged that there would be a digital literate in every household by 2020 through its Digital India Mission that aims to create digital empowered society and knowledge-economy model in the country. It envisages that people will gain knowledge through digital platforms and empower themselves.

The Digital India Mission aims to create broadband highways, universal and increased access to mobile connectivity, heralding e-governance, e-delivery of services and public interface, increased transparency and reduced corruption and information for all.

The privatisation and opening of telecommunications sector has helped accelerate the growth of internet in the country and there were plethora of cheap data and calling plans as they were on a competitive price in the highly competitive sector of the private telecom operators.

Media usage patterns are also undergoing tremendous changes in terms of the people's choice of viewing media content through Over-the-Top platforms. Though there were only 12 million active users for the OTT platforms in the year 2014, their number will witness a huge spike (Media Partners Asia-2014).

With the peoples fast changing media consumption habits, the television content producers, film makers, and the independent content producers have also started producing the specialised content for the OTTs.

The experience of watching content on the on-the-go and any time access choice and the facilities like pause, rewind and forward are all adding to the immensely growing popularity of the media usage in the OTT platforms.

Even the rural areas riding on the wave of regional language content and videos and text are witnessing huge jump in the media consumption and the internet boom that has witnessed 2.5 hike in internet penetration is contributing for the change in the media landscape and usage through the internet revolution in the country.

In order to compete with the rise in the internet-based media and the peoples patronage and shift to the new and digital modes of news consumption, the traditional media houses like print and the television are also rebooting their business strategies to retain their news consumers and retain their advertisers base as well.

It is a phenomenon of a kind where the print media is slowly losing its second position in getting the ad revenues from the advertisers as there is a dramatic increase in the digital ad spends by the advertisers, who always plan to reach out to the potential customers in an most effective way.

According to the data given by the Dentsu Aegis Network (DAN-2019), the digital ad spend witnessed a massive 26 per cent increase during the last year and has reached a whopping Rs 13,683 cr in India. The report also predicted that there is an expected increase of digital ad spends by 27 per cent in the year 2020.

At the same time, the digital in India is expected to grow at a good 25 per cent while the same for the print media is only three per cent, the report pointed out. The DAN report pointed out that digital ad segment will witness bigger jump than the traditional media.

As there is a greater threat to the traditional media by the fast growing digital media, there is likely a major shift in the media landscape of the country. In order to face the competition from the digital media, the print and electronic media are using the same internet-based technology to leverage their sales and stay in the completion by retaining and expanding their customer base.

The newspapers have started their online editions, e-paper facility to engage their readers who prefer to access their content on the digital platforms and many newspapers have also started charging their readers for accessing their content on the digital platforms like the epaper.

The newspapers and the television channels are coming up with the special news apps to cater to the digital media consumers and maintain their business relevance and there is a still lot of credibility to the news content supplied by the print and electronic media organisations that are known to have authenticity and responsibility for the content they provide. The main issue in the digital news platforms other than the newspapers and television channels is the credibility and authenticity as anybody can be creator of content and its disseminator.

Conclusion:

There is a definite shift and change in the media landscape of India with increase in internet availability and its expansion and with around 50 per cent of the population having internet accessibility in the country. The shift in the landscape of the media is resulting in the increased stress on the digital platforms that were enabled by internet. With India emerging as the country

offering cheap and affordable data and its position as the largest data consumer per person in the world, there is an even greater scope for the digital and OTT platforms to grow.

It is time for the traditional media organisations to improve and expand their digital presence to effect a change in the mode of content delivery and to retain the ad revenues that they are slowly losing to the digital ad spends by the advertisers. The authenticity and credibility issues remain relevant to the digital platforms especially the digital news as the sources fail to act responsibly and as the regulation becomes difficult with every one content creator and disseminator and consumer.

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