

Does Creating Content on YouTube Qualifies for Good Digital Outcome? Understanding the Use of Digital Media by Tribal Women in India

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Abstract: *This paper explored the intersection of gender, technology and cultural representation through a case study of a YouTube channel 'Murum Panja' run by a tribal woman and her family in West Bengal, India. Situated within the broader context of digital gender divide and historical marginalisation of indigenous communities, the study highlights how affordable mobile phones and internet access have enabled indigenous women to reclaim cultural identity and visibility. Drawing on qualitative methods including interview and content analysis the paper investigates how digital media, YouTube in particular serves as an alternative platform for cultural preservation and expression. The findings reveal that the channel is a product of familiar collaboration where traditional knowledge is digitised and shared globally. The study underscores the transformative role of mobile technology in empowering tribal women to become cultural archivists and content creators bridging generational gaps and challenging socio-digital exclusions through participatory media practices.*

Keywords: Mobile phone, YouTube channel, Women, Murum Panja, Tribal

1. Introduction

Indigenous women are viewed as micro-marginalised section of the society in India. They suffer double layer of marginalisation and identity crisis. The facilitation of (affordable) mobile phone and (cheap) internet packs in recent years have paved a way for indigenous women to look for world beyond the kitchen. In a collectivist society like India, majority of studies argue that women face barrier in mobile phone access and ownership (Bhatia et al., 2019, Potnis, 2016). Their owning/using of mobile phone is commissioned by male folks (husband or father or even male sibling) of the family (Scott et al., 2019). They are subjected to temporary monitoring and prolonged surveillance (Bhallamudi, 2022). A woman, keeping a mobile phone, is considered harmful for the woman, family and for the society as a whole (Bhatia et al., 2019). This has given birth of gendered digital divide. This digital divide is persistent among tribal community. Tribal community itself is a community of socio-economic marginalisation. The diffusion of mobile phone technology therefore becomes complex.

In recent years, scholars across the world are studying tribal community in India (Chattopadhyay and Mohanty 2022; Dutta, 2016; Khatun, 2020). They have pointed out the historical marginalisation of tribal community. While they have been victims of prolonged historical marginalisation and receiver of residual attention in mainstream media (Dutta, 2018), they have found out an alternative space for representation in the growing internet age through social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook. YouTube has been utilised as an important platform for representation of tribal voice because of its participatory nature (add reference). YouTube allows the audience to create and upload content that has the potential to gain more popularity than mainstream audio-visual content like film and television. In recent times, YouTube has been emerged as a platform to highlight cultural diversity of Indigenous people.

They portray everyday lifestyle and culture. It attracts large amount of viewership.

This has become possible for the advent of mobile media. Women are actively participating in process of content creation. In terms of tribal women, a trend of representation of indigenous culture through mobile phone has become a doable job. From the creation of content to editing and uploading, and learning of the entire process has become possible because of the interactive nature of Web 3.0. This paper, thus, attempt to study a tribal YouTube channel, run by a tribal woman as a form of alternative media to represent their culture to masses where mobile phone and internet plays a crucial role to learn and do the job.

2. Review of Literature

Use of Social Media Platforms

Castleton (2018) studied use of Facebook (now Meta) in Inuit Youth (of Northern Canada) with a focus to learn the relationship between technology and Inuit Identity. He noted that Inuit youth use Facebook for three major reasons: (1) individual's use for personal life for staying connected with friends, family and relatives and stay upto date for daily chores and what is going in the community (2) for reflection and support i.e., for expression of personal thoughts and to challenge stereotype against the indigenous Inuit community that attempts to discriminate the community, to manage their own representation. For them ICTs (laptop, phone, satellite) has granted them new agency by which they can respond the stereotypes and reflect on their socio-cultural situation, (3) they join Facebook groups, through which they learn their old traditions like how things were done in older days. They use these Facebook groups to present their culture online, to know their identity and to learn traditional techniques and knowledge for hunting and survival. Even they acquire knowledge about great skills for hunting and survival and they see these groups as important for cultural conservation. On similar lines, Virtanen (2015) studied the use of social

media that help to foster, motivate and social relations among the Arawakan and Panoan-speaking indigenous groups in the state of Acre and Southern part of the state of Amazonas, Brazil where smallest town has high speed internet. The author found that how social networking sites are generating new reflections on Amazonian indigenous traditions and knowledge and changing the way indigenous Amazonians relate to others. They use social media predominantly for (1) reproducing relationship with the people they know (2) for discussing one's personal life, (3) for expressing political opinions related to indigenous politics and (4) for organising meeting as they use social media to distribute news and initiation of non-indigenous alliance and (5) for enabling new contacts. Cornthassel et al. (2020) studies the use of Instagram by indigenous people on Turtle Island (Canada and USA) have met the challenges of the COVID-19 in their communities and their daily practices of community resurgence through social media. They created an Instagram account called 'Everyday Indigenous Resurgence' (EIR) that highlights the diverse ways Indigenous people engage with their indigeneity during pandemic. The research work shares the perspectives of four indigenous land-based practitioners who contributed to the EIR account. This presents their personal stories and reflections who are from four different nations and backgrounds. They describe stories about how they have learned from the land, the plants and the medicines, the language and the stories of their ancestors and relatives. They also acknowledge how social media is used as a tool of connection, empowerment and inspiration by them. Social media, for them, offer a new form of connection for Indigenous people relating to their food, land, waterways, languages and living stories. Outakoski et al. (2018) noticed the use of social media by the Sami community (a Europe based indigenous community) for strengthening their language. And how they are revitalising their language. They demonstrate multiple examples of the use of social media to preserve their language. They cited instances of two gamers of this community created an YouTube channel for gaming and keep the language, Sami language (the minority language) with an national level language (with a majority language); a blogger who belong to the Sami community but now move out to the other region, they write blog in Sami language expressing the struggle of being in the community with a lesbian identity; Sami community use hashtags for their language with their posts to draw attention of condition of Sami language speakers on twitter (now X); they have designed mobile apps to containing words and phrases and launched it as a course to revitalise their language.

3. Research Methodology

In this article, I have studied the 'Murum Panja' channel, which primarily shows the tribal folk videos as claimed by the holders of the channel. The selection of the channel was purposive because this channel was found during a pilot study of a PhD research work. This channel is tribal-based and operates from West Bengal, India. This channel has around 8k (thousand) subscribers and has total view approximately 7 million. The name of the channel has been kept original as consent given by the account holder.

In this research work, a qualitative approach has been taken as the objective was to explore the use of digital media by

tribal women and to study the participatory nature of YouTube as a medium. Therefore, the participants of the research belong to the marginalised section of the society. The primary setting of the of the study is a village in the Hooghly district of West Bengal, India. In-dept unstructured interview has been conducted with the specific authority of the channel.

The interview was conducted in Bengali and later it was translated into English. Apart from the interview, an exploration of YouTube channel was also done to understand the type of videos posted.

4. Research Findings

The channel name is 'Murum Panja' that consists of Murum and Panja. According to the interviewee Murum is a deer like animal from which the Murmu dynasty (tribal dynasty) had supposedly born. and 'Panja' means footsteps. Therefore, Murum Panja means the 'footsteps of Murum'.

The channel was started in the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021. And the recording of the videos started in COVID-19 only. When we asked about who thought of starting the channel, she replied *'once my father accidentally had created a YouTube channel on his phone and earlier, we did not know that creating videos on YouTube can give earning also. We thought people do it may be out of fun. So, we also did it without thinking about money. Actually, this particular video was first recorded to post on my father's social media account (Facebook) but since I come to know from my friends about YouTube, on the same day we uploaded it on YouTube.'*

One of the main reasons found in the interview to post videos online was the interviewee's father has been doing tribal singing and dancing programmes since his early age. He even until COVID-19 had a personal music band with some peers. Prior to COVID-19, they used to be called to various Santali tribal offline programmes, but during COVID-19, it could not be sustained. *'My father has all traditional instruments, which he himself uses and teaches also. Therefore, everything we do with our folk songs, is originally created by us only.'*

Sharing the purpose of posting videos on YouTube and Facebook, the interviewee said that *'all our traditional songs, dance, rituals are not written in an articular mythological book like yours (of Hindus) 'Geeta' or 'Ramayana'. Our ancestors have passed it to us orally. Many people from our own community do not even know much of our culture. But fortunate, my father had the opportunity to learn many traditional folk things from his parents and grand-parents. He believes in protecting, preserving and representing all cultural practices to the people who are not aware of it. Now going to door to door is not possible, therefore, through this YouTube channel, we are trying to protect our culture.'*

The YouTube videos are made with mobile phone only. It is recorded in the interviewee's father's phone. The phone costs them twenty-five thousand and it has been more than five years they have it. When we tried to find out how they managed to spent the amount on a mobile handset. The interviewee said, *'my father is in a government job, he works in a post office and he paid for the mobile phone.'* Economic condition allow tribe to spent a thick amount of money of

mobile phone. Digging more into it, it was found that the interviewee and her mother too have individual mobile phones. While her mother's phone was a used one which her father passed onto her mother. And the interviewee herself has a new mobile phone. Every phone in their house are separately recharged with both for calls and for internet pack. Average amount spent on a single recharge is between 200-450 rupees which lasts from 28 days to 56 days.

Participants of the videos: Observing the videos of the channel, three persons were found to be common in most of the videos. The interviewee, her parents. Few diverse faces are also visible in videos and the interviewee identified them as brother and neighbour or relatives sometimes. When we asked the interviewee how come female join the groups, she shared *'me, my mothers and my aunt used to join the offline singing group. I am joining since childhood, may be was 8-9 years old then. Me and mother joined the group probably in 2007. We used to do singing. By the way, before this singing group, my father had a dancing group at our locality. He used to train them. The dance form is called 'Karam' which is our festive special dance. We had both boys and girls dance group separately but as they all grew up and got married, the group could not exist anymore.'*

Although the initiator of the channel has been the interviewee's father, the interviewee and her mother do play significant role in creation, production and presentation of the videos. They sing, they play instruments, they edit and they post the videos. The ideas of video are plotted by the interviewee's father. He, himself writes songs and the interviewee and her mother play the singing role.

'In duet songs, me and my mother sing. Whatever song we sing is written and composed by my father, our most of the songs are rebellious kind of songs, and rest is sometime love related, there play the role of singing. Other than this, we play instruments like 'ghunghur'. In our songs, or focus is to keep the vocal and lyrics up, we try to minimise the use of instruments so that they do not dominate the real essence of the song.'

The first video on the channel was posted in 2021 on the tribal festival known as 'Sohorai sereng' celebrated in the month of November. They had first shared the video on Meta (then Facebook) *'Our 1st video about 'sohorai sereng' meaning sohorai our festival that happens in November, we created our first video on it. We first uploaded it on Facebook and as we got good response within hours, so we thought to upload it on YouTube also'*. Their first video crossed sex thousand views in two days on Meta (then Facebook) and 26 thousand on YouTube views within 3 days.

The editing is done by the interviewee herself. At the beginning, mobile apps like in-short was used to do editing. She shared. *'I learnt it from YouTube (then), now me and brother do the edit.'* She has learnt the technical process to creating and producing all a videos from YouTube itself. She taught her brother also. Seeing the curiosity, her father called on of his friends to teach editing. She and her brothers know both the video and the sound editing. She has learnt the basics of editing and rest she practices while editing her own videos. Her mother is the singer of the songs that her father writes.

They have all the technical instruments required for recording. From mic, to PC and special lighting in the room that they record.

We found out that the channel is monetised but they refused to reveal the earning amount. They keep the money saved and do not really make an expenditure with the YouTube earning.

Production of the video: Unlike professional creators, their videos are not scheduled. They do not have a professional script to memorise and rehearse. Her father plots everything and directs them kind of expression needed. The interviewee said, *'...No rehearsal as such, my father directs me on camera and unless we are getting the perfect shot'*. For attire *'We keep it traditionally, as my father has composed the song, he tells us wearing what would be perfect, but I also make some suggestions'*.

Not all the videos are posted on Meta. They first prioritise to post the video on YouTube. *'...we decide it mutually, even now, we record it whenever we get time and we edit whenever we get free time e do not have a fixed schedule for everything'*

Editing of video: As the editing of the video is done by the interviewee and her brother, they do it in the free time. They prioritise their study first and dedicate some hours on personal computer to finish editing. They upload videos on YouTube on Meta from phone only. She shared that it takes almost 2 GB to 3 GB internet to upload a video on average of 10 minute. As her recharge plan allows only 1.5 GB of data, she buys data booster of 5 GB prior to upload. Every time, she has to upload a video, she has to come out of her home to get the good speed of internet. She shared, *'Upload from phone, I have to go out to from home to upload video, as my home is at such a place that network is too poor to use, therefore I have to go out from home to upload video, we try to keep our video quality good. We have different kind of videos on our channel, for music videos it takes almost 15 to 20 min but for tutorial videos (like tumdah) it takes almost an hour'*.

Facebook page and murum panja and Jitendra nath Murmu, we have id's open in our both phones to upload videos

For them, mobile phone has brought lot of changes in their lives. Especially, the interviewee herself and her mother. It has given them an opportunity to cultivate an identity. For both of the women,

'Mobile phone has made easy to spread our culture to tribal and non-tribal population Also. Like my friends in my whats app contact lists of who are following us who are tribal and only know santali language no the traditional songs and instruments will definitely know it. And most of the time (tribal) parents now a days do not pay attention to introduce their culture and inculcate the cultural practices, thats why when they have mobile phone, they use it for many purposes but not promoting or knowing their own culture and practices, this is more prevalent towns and cities but in villages, young people at least see their cultural practices in different festivals. However, social media has played a very important role in promoting our cultural things like if I am posting something, it is being shown to people that I can't reach them physically.'

5. Conclusion

From the interviews, we found that the interviewee and her mother has been playing a crucial role to run the channel. The foundation laid by the interviewee's father is to preserve the culture with physical programmes, the legacy is taken forward by the interviewee and her mother through online mode. Their depiction of the tribal community and urge to represent the tribal culture and songs in modern society through mobile phone is a repeated effort to tribal people are a part of the society. And the proprietor of the channel has a government job in Indian Postal Services, it is acknowledged by the interviewee that their 'good' financial condition allows them to continue the channel. Especially the presence of multiple mobile phones in their household.

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