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NEW MEDIA IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: STRATEGIES AND REACH OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper was conducted to analyse the reach and strategies of new media by the government for the rural development. Study was focused on new media reach and accessibility of rural residents near the capital region of Bihar. Methods of the study were taken survey, in-depth interview and analysis of dissemination of information on new media. Survey was conducted among the villager, in-depth interview was taken of an officer of Information & Public Relation Department of Bihar and analysis of Facebook pages was done. Findings indicate that new media can play a vital role in rural development, but there are many factors responsible for restricting the rural residents from getting the benefits of these new media platforms. Government is running various new media campaigns to aware the people of the rural community about the use of new media for their development, but they are prevented from using these platforms because of the infrastructure of internet, ease of use and the prevailing stigma of insecurity. The paper illustrates that new media can be a major tool of development in rural areas, yet it needs to be used with the sense of responsibility and carefulness.

KEYWORDS*: Ease of use, Insecurity, Internet infrastructure, IPRD, New Media, Rural Development.*

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a world in which technology carry with them spectacular promises to solve problems and delivering development. Information Communication Technology (ICT) carries similar promises to connect poor people to the knowledge society which in turn will bring development. This belief is based on Diffusion of Innovation Theory given by Rogers. This theory emphasize on the idea of diffusing innovative practices and knowledge to the society. According to him the missing link in the process of development is lack of knowledge and information. Therefore key policy instrument becomes how to link poor rural people to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

India is primarily a country of villages where majority of population resides in rural areas. Rural population economic activities are related to unorganized sector. And in this sector majority of population around 60% are dependent on agricultural activities. To make India a developed country policy makers have to find out the way of improving the condition of rural population. Development threshold of rural population is different from urban population. Development threshold is identified by three development gaps:

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- Socio Economic Gap
- Knowledge Gap
- Communication Gap

Socio economic gap is identified with socio economic status of people. As majority of rural population is occupied in agriculture sector the indicator of socio economic gap can be assessed from the data of land holdings.

Knowledge of these strategies becomes very important for rural population. Knowledge gap becomes very important to define development threshold. Rural population lacks needed and necessary information for adopting new strategies. Knowledge does not include only economic knowledge but also the information which may enhance their self-esteem and they feel very much part of this society.

To fill the communication gap swift transfer of knowledge is needed. Government has introduced many media strategies to fill this gap and make people more informed. All media forms – Print media, electronic media (TV & Radio) and internet – are being used for development purposes. Since the start of printing in India during British rule newspapers and other publications had single motive. All the newspapers at that time tried to mobilize people for freedom struggle and it emerged as a mass mobilizer. After independence newspaper changed its strategy and started setting agenda for the people. It became a tool to aware people regarding various social issues. Most importantly government focused on developmental issues and tried to aware people regarding population growth, five year plan and agricultural growth. Radio broadcasting which started in 1924 by Madras Presidency Club

After independence television broadcasting started in India. Doordarshan started functioning on 15th September 1959.But now in India, internet penetration is increasing day by day. According to IAMAI report 2017 internet users in India is expected to reach between 450-465 million by June 2017. Report also says that growth in internet users is largely fuelled by rural population especially young generation. This medium has some unique features which were not available in other mediums. Now information can be shared and stored on individual basis. Services and information can also be provided online. This does not only save time and energy of people but it also ensures quality services. Bihar comes under less internet penetration state among Orissa, West Bengal and Assam. Bihar has 9% internet penetration according BCG, CCI rural digital influence study 2015, 2016. In this report it was also found that rural people don't use internet for online purchases. Majority of them use internet for news and videos. It was also estimated in the report that rural internet users will increase from about 120 million in 2015 to about 315 million in 2020.

Considering the potential of new media government has also formulated new media strategies to reach out rural population. All the Panchayats are connected with internet where people can access government online services. Telecommunication companies have also reached out the rural India and expanded their business by providing internet facilities in competitive rate. Seeing the possibility government has collaborated all the new media initiatives and started a flagship program 'Digital India'. This program focuses on building infrastructure and providing all the facilities online. It also focuses on providing information and services in regional languages.

As per census 2011 rural population of Bihar is 88.70%. To take the state on the path of development government need to focus on rural Bihar. For this a proper media strategy is needed to make people aware of new innovations and practices. As new media has emerges as strong medium it is important to see the strategies and reach of new media platform among rural people of Bihar.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since this study is related to new media and rural development it is important to understand basic characteristics of new media which are helpful for common people. To understand role of ICT in rural development various theoretical approaches are reviewed. New media is related to e-governance, e-commerce and other processes of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). The expectation from these is that it will lead to improvements in governance, effective delivery of services,

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competiveness etc. These expectations make the theoretical background of this study. The development of e-services is directly linked to the active involvement of citizens and the delivery of public services (WSIS, 2011).

IAMAI report suggests that mobile internet users are growing rapidly over the last few years. According to the report, by the end of 2015, 306 million users were using internet on their mobile phones in which 219 million people were from urban and 80 million people were from rural areas. It has also added to the fast growth in the number of internet users. It is estimated that by June 2016, mobile internet user base touches 371 million mark. This is the reason why percentage of mobile internet users has grown more rapidly than traditional broadband users.

Seeing the possibility of new media as a mode of service delivery government of India took several steps to provide new media platforms to the common people. In 1970 government established Department of Electronics. In 1977 government brought information and communication in focus and established National Information Centre (NIC). Government put more thrust in 1987 when it established NIcNET (National Satellite-based Computer Network) followed by the establishment of District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DISNIC) to computerize all the district offices of the country.

Researchers have identified key areas where new media can be used for rural development most notably Yadav, N. & Singh, V.B (2012).
- Capturing and monitoring the major activities and services in agriculture sector
- Local information mechanism through which prices of seeds, fertilizers, loan rates etc. can be provided.
- Disaster management
- Land record management
- E-governance at panchayat level

Based on these areas many initiatives were taken from central government and state governments. Bihar government also started some initiatives in 2008. These include Comprehensive Treasury Management Information System (CTMIS), Value Added Tax Management Information System (VATMIS), citizen centric portal (Bihar online), Integrated Workflow and Document Management System (IWDMS), BRAIN- data centre and Bihar State Wide Area Network (Bihar-SWAN).

All these initiatives are very much in the interest of rural people. No such studies have been found targeting the reach of all these initiatives to the people. This study will focus on the ground reality of these programmes and other new media strategies.

OBJECTIVES
- To find out new media strategies of Govt. of Bihar for rural development.
- To find out reach & access of new media platforms among rural people.
- To find out the factors affecting reach of new media platforms in rural regions.

METHODS
In this study researcher had opted triangulation method in which content analysis and survey tools were used as quantitative method and in depth-interview was used as qualitative method.

CONTENT ANALYSIS
Content analysis of social media pages of Ministry of Rural development of Bihar and Information and Public Relation Department (IPRD), Bihar were reviewed to find out new media strategies. Interview of social media executives of rural development department was also conducted to find out new media strategies to reach out rural people.

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SURVEY

Survey among villagers living near Capital city Patna was done to know the access of the digital platforms among the rural people. Sample size of 100 people was taken through random sampling. Data were derived on the basis of the variables like Gender, Income, Farming Area and Age.

INTERVIEW

Interview of Social Media Executives was also takennot to know only new media strategies but also various factors which affect the reach and access of New Media platforms among rural people. Facts from secondary data were also taken to verify the details of interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
New media strategies of Govt. of Bihar for rural development

Government has planned various strategies on New Media platforms to disseminate information about rural development in rural areas. Many social media executives are appointed to run New Media pages of Government to propagate information about various schemes and projects run by Government. These executives are assigned roles to use social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Google+ and Twitter to communicate to the masses, listen to their concerns and provide the needed information. These executives run various campaigns during major events like Bihar Diwas, etc to gather people and talk to them in-person and solve their problems or bringing their problems to the concerned authority.

But on the other hand majority of rural residents are still not able to use these facilities provided by Government. As, only about 26.7 per cent of people were using Government provided facilities on New Media platforms and a small number of 1.7 per cent users were able to access information from the New Media page of IPRD.
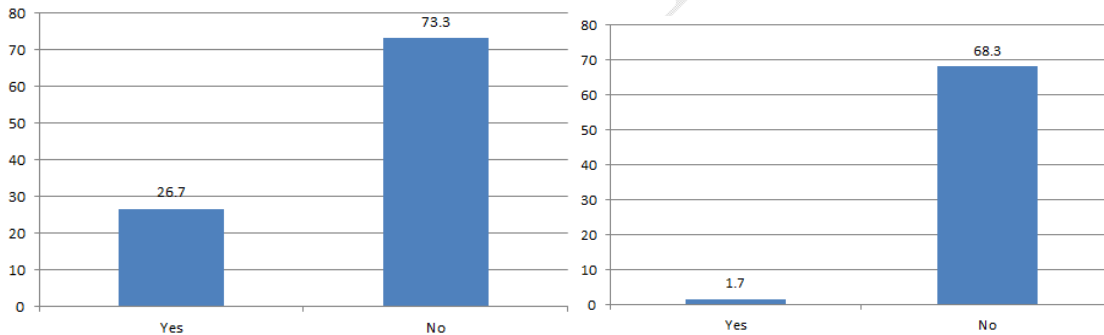

Table 1.1- Access to Government services   Table 1.2- Information gathering from IPRD

REACH & ACCESS OF NEW MEDIA PLATFORMS AMONG RURAL PEOPLE

This study reveals that rural population had limited access to the new media platforms. In the study area only 60 percent people have access to new media platforms. And among those who had access of these media platforms their uses pattern suggests that they did not use these platforms to use government online services, rather they prefer to use it for entertainment and information gathering. The rural population was interested in using Whatsapp more than Facebook. It means that personalized use of new media platforms were more rampant. Among the 60 percent people who had internet connection, female participation was only 19 percent.
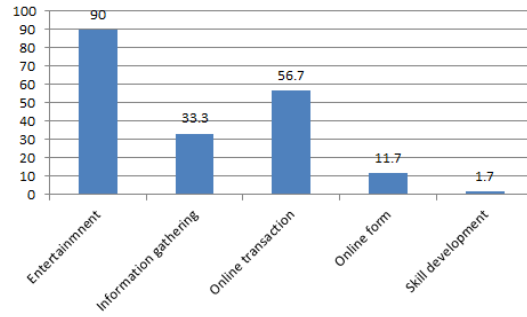
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Table 1.3- Purpose of Internet use

In Bihar, government is focusing on connecting with people through Facebook pages for information dissemination. But the uses pattern of people was not supportive to this idea. The action of not accessing the content provided by Government was caused by the lack of awareness of rural residents, as majority of users had no idea about social media pages run by Government because Government had started using these platforms from 2017. Government has launched many online services and applications to disseminate information about their schemes and policies to support their welfare campaign. But the survey demonstrates that majority of the rural residents were not using the government services provided on internet and they did not have any online application of government in their smartphones. This action of not using the internet for the government services or not having any application was mainly caused by the awareness level of the villagers. Those who had internet connection were willing to use online facilities provided by government but majority of them had no idea how to use it.
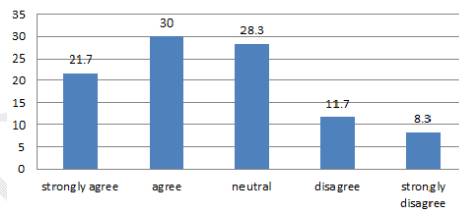

Table 1.4- Lack of Awareness

Data demonstrates that 100 percent of female internet users were not using government services or did not possess any government application in their smartphones. Thus a large section of the rural residents remain deprived from many schemes and policies of the government those can be taken advantage at their doorsteps.Internet is also providing a lot of options for banking facilities for users to get benefits of doing transactions at their home. But on the other hand this survey reveals that a large segment of the rural residents did not use online facilities provided by the banking system. In using internet for banking purposes female partaking percentage was much inferior to male user's percentage. During the study it has been found that people form rural areas were eager to use internet facilities for banking transaction, government services and for many other things as they agreed that internet is time saving.
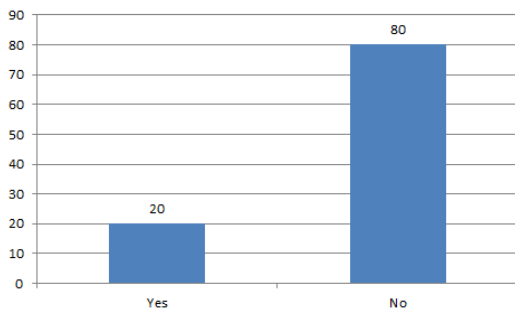
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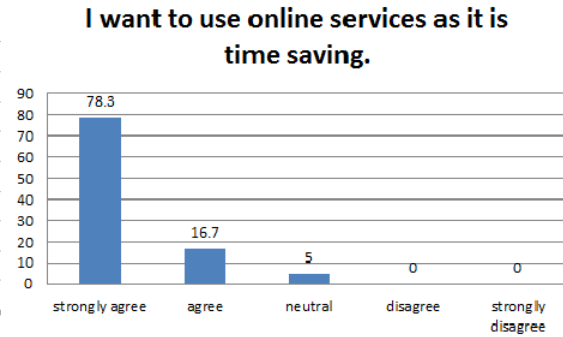**Table 1.5- Use of Online Banking**

Table 1.6- Internet is time efficient

Factors affecting the reach of new media platforms in rural regions

During the study many factors were found those were affecting the reach of new media platforms in rural regions.

Lack of infrastructure

As we know that government has a policy to connect all the Panchayat Bhawan with internet by opening CSC (Common Service Centre), but in the survey village there was no internet connection in Panchayat Bhawan. Also government has not appointed any person to help villagers to access online facilities. Due to lack of appointed person, people were not aware that government is using New Media platforms to disseminate informations. This was the reason that people did not know about IPRD page on Facebook. Due to this lack of infrastructure and knowledge about IPRD rural residents were not able to reach to the Facebook posts of IPRD. A large segment of the internet users felt that its speed was also a big drawback of internet infrastructure and this was the main reason of stopping them from using government services provided on internet.
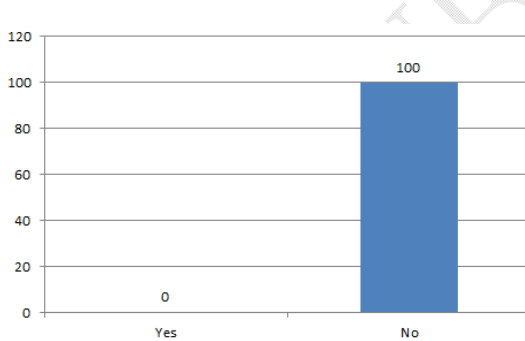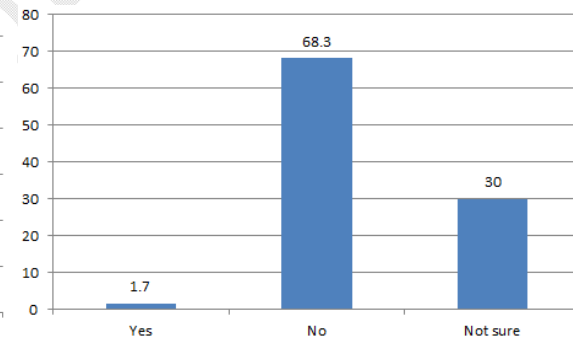

Table 1.7- Internet facility at Panchayat Bhawan

Table 1.8- Reach to the posts of IPRD

Insecurity

Another factor in preventing the use of online banking facilities was the insecurity stigma of the people about it. Most people still had a common conjecture that online use of banking system is yet not as strong as it should be. But still a large segment of the village was using transaction facilities provided on internet but on the other side majority of them had shown their concern about its safety and security level.
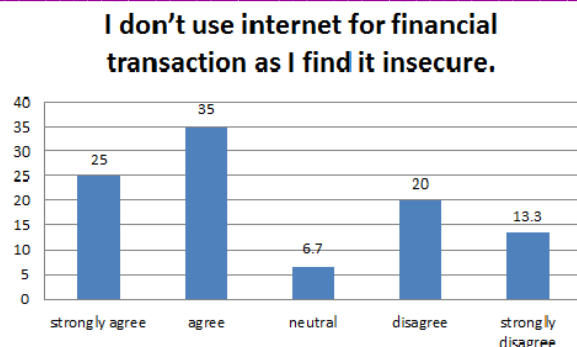
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I don't use internet for financial transaction as I find it insecure.

Table 1.9- Level of insecurity

Ease of use

Ease of use was also a factor of preventing internet users in using many government services. Majority of the internet users found it very difficult to use government services provided on internet as it was hard to access. Government has provided a lot of services and programs on internet for the rural residents but majority of them were not able to access those services and programs due to the complexity of the provided content on the website and the education level of the users.

Lack of awareness

Lack of awareness was found another factor responsible for preventing the users from taking advantage of government services and online banking facilities. People who had internet connection were mainly using it for entertainment and communication purposes. Due to the lack of information most of them were not aware that they can use new media platforms for gathering information about government schemes and policies. Among new media users majority of people were unaware of the fact that government has also strategized the new media platforms for information propagation and promotions of schemes and policies for the development of the rural regions. Apart from not receiving information on new media platforms people had no idea how to use government services provided on internet and government applications.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrate that residents from rural areas had shown interest in the use of new media platforms to access the information about development programs and for the online transaction purposes, but most of them were not able to use neither government services nor the online transaction facilities. And this inaccessibility to the services was caused by the complexity of the content provided by the government. So, the government must take this concern of complexity in content seriously and make the system more user- friendly, so that most users can get benefited by the services. Majority of the new media users who were already using online transactions, showed their concern about the security level of the transaction process. Lack of infrastructure was another issue found, that was restricting the users from getting advantages from the new media platforms. Government has planned to provide internet facilities to each and every village, but in the study village still there was no internet connection at the Panchayat Bhawan and there was no one appointed to help the villagers to access the information provided by the government on new media platforms. Thus, the government does not only need to work on the content complexity issue and internet infrastructure, but they also need to work on the prevailing stigma of insecurity about online transaction in rural areas.

On the other hand this study also reveals that majority of the new media users were using it mostly for entertainment and communication purposes and this was keeping them isolated from the mainstream development discourses run by the Government. A large segment of the users were not aware that government is running campaigns on new media for information dissemination about the rural development programs. So, the users also need to be aware of the fact that they can use new

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media platforms not only for entertainment purposes but for information gathering and for being a part of development process too. For this Government needs to organize awareness campaign in rural areas.

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