

Need and Necessity of Digital Media Literacy in North-East India

Dr. Sewa Singh Bajwa

Professor
Department of Journalism & Mass Communication,
Ch. Devi Lal University, Sirsa.

Abstract- India is the seventh largest country in the world with a huge variety of caste, color and creed. There are a number of cultures with a huge variety of customs which have the identity of their own. More than 200 languages are spoken in India. India is regarded as a sub-continent because of huge variety this land and the people possess. There is great variety with regard to geography. There are some mountainous states. Then there are states where there is dessert. Then there is Southern Peninsula which is inhabited by Dravidian people. The geography of the South is entirely different from the North. South India is surrounded by Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. There is great dissimilarity of South Indians with regard to language, modes of agriculture, types of crops, food grains, vegetation, climate, food habits and dressing habits etc. When we talk about mountainous states they have rich culture of their own. Most of these are Himalayan countries as North India is surrounded by the great Himalayas in the North. The land, culture and vegetation etc. of Central India are different from other parts of the country. When we talk about the West there is Thar dessert mostly in Rajasthan and Ran of Kuchh in Gujrat. This paper discusses the need and necessity of MIL in North-East India.

Keywords: Peninsula, Customs, Dravidian, vegetation, Himalayas, North-East.

INTRODUCTION:

The culture and geography of these states is different from other states. When we move towards the North-East it seems to be having a unique world of its own. One enters this area through a narrow land opening between the boundaries of Bhutan and Bangladesh. Once you enter this area you find as if you have arrived in altogether a different world. There are seven states in this mountainous region. That's why it has been called Land of Seven Sisters. The culture, economy, vegetation, language etc. of this area are quite different from other parts of the country. Cottage industry is found in plenty here. Though there are natural sources but even then the per capita income of people here is low as compared to other states. There is lack of railway tracks and Air Ports. Roads are the only mode of transportation. These are rainy states with Meghalaya being the most rainy state in the World. The seven states of this part of the country are Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. These are hilly states and the life is tough. But literacy rate is better than many other states. The penetration of Mass Media is also not so good but Digital Media and Social Media have transcended all geographical barriers.



Source: <https://nehascop.com/2017/12/28/digital-north-east/>

DISCUSSION:

Information sharing and indulging in communication has been the hallmark of humanity since ages. From sending messages through pigeons to email or other Social Media networking sites, the humanity has witnessed a number of phases in the means of communication. We are living in Digital era which has revolutionized the world of communication. India has seen a phenomenal growth of Digital Media particularly after 2017. The North East has always been under represented in National media. There is hardly any news about this part of the country in industrial media. Due to cheap and fast data provided by telecom companies, this area could enjoy the fruits of Digital Media. This region has been depending on local newspapers and local TV channels as these

states could never get their due representation in National Media. But digital media may plug that gap. So that people of this region may make use of social media and digital media like any other part of the world. But, yes, because of hilly areas weak internet signals will be a problem in many parts. One hopes that after the arrival of Digital Media faster delivery of news and Mobile Journalism will cater to the information and entertainment needs of people here. But one must admit that there is a lot to be done in these states with regard to Digital Media. There is need for investing in Android and iOS applications.



Source: <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/northeast-india>

In recent years Social Media platforms have become integral part of people as sharing of views, ideas and information is much easier. Social Media depends heavily on user generated uncensored medias content which has given rise to proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. There are plenty of 'self styled' ayurvedic, homoeopathy and naturopathy videos on YouTube which lack authenticity. Any false medical advice in these videos can lead to serious consequences. Misinformation about political issues can lead to hate speech and communal violence. Undoubtedly, there is rapid flow of information on social media but spread of misinformation can cause unheard damage to cultural and national integration. On social media virtually anyone can post any type of information in any form regardless of its accuracy and authenticity. Here comes the need to spread Digital Media Literacy among people so they don't fall a pray to the nefarious designs of anti-social elements. Media Literacy means understanding technical and societal aspects of media particularly digital media.. People must be educated about making use of digital tools and must be able to create, share and consume messages and information available on digital media. Succinctly speaking, people must be able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Fact checking and cross checking of facts is of utmost importance. Critical and analytical thinking needs to be developed and inculcated among people so that people may be able to shun untrustworthy and fake news. That is why Digital Media Literacy has become quite significant in this region so that people this region should not get swayed by Digital boom as it happened in other parts of the country.

Remaining offline in digital era is a curse and cause of embarrassment these days. Having no access to Internet is just unimaginable. Think about the 'Land of Seven Sisters' with a population of about 5 crore, it still remains stereotyped and highly underdeveloped. It seems to be the guest of the rest of India. It is blotted to be tribal with limited knowledge. North East stands out so far as beauty of the region is concerned but it fails to prove its worth when it comes to litmus test. Bill gates predicted in 2010 that till 2015 education would come from web. We find he was absolutely right in saying so. North east is the most unblessed region so far as digital literacy is concerned. It is astonishing to note that in the region where education is not at all a problem, digitization and modern ways and means of learning are almost conspicuously absent here. In this era digital learning and knowledge of digital techniques are a necessity. The only requirement is to channelize the direction in order to eliminate digital divide. That's perhaps why students of North East migrate to the North or South India for attaining higher education. There is lack of employment opportunities and no scope of higher education in this region. If the youth of North East gets best technical education in their own states they will never migrate to the areas thousands miles away from their homes. If technical education is provided to them in their own region they can work wonders just like the youth of rest of India. For the time being it seems that the North East is digitally dumb. Unfortunately it seems true. This region has a long way to go in order catch up with other regions of the country. Before solving a problem, we need to understand the problem. In this case – We must ask the question – Is north east really digitally dumb? Unfortunately Yes, This region is still struggling to be a winner in the digital divide race. The below diagram shows the literacy rate in the North East states:

Literacy rate in Assam is 73.2%, Meghalaya 75.5%, Manipur 79.8%, Nagaland 80.1%, Mizoram 91.6% and Tripura 94.6%. Tripura has the distinction of being the most literate state in the country. Now the question arises as to why these states lag far behind in digital excellence parameters. Having very high literacy rate is not enough; this region needs special drive to provide people digital literacy so that they can also get the boons of digital media. The students here desire for smart phones and tablets to work independently. Their creative mind allures them to be a part of this digital race. The students of this region struggle to migrate to other parts of the country for higher education. The difference of haves and have not's is too big to plug up. The current education scenario in North east is not at par with rest of India. Students of North East consider themselves backward as they are far behind the digitally literate students of other states. They remain unskilled and unemployed. Then there are infrastructural loopholes. For

unknown reasons the North East has got step motherly treatment so far on technical front. It has not been given the importance it deserves. Even the tourism sector in the region is much behind the hilly states of North India. The region has rich natural resources but there is great lack of connectivity. Most parts of the region are hilly areas which become a stumbling block in development. Because of the terrain the signals are often get disturbed.

So far are technical education is concerned both the teachers and students are deprived of it. This deprivation is because of non availability of infrastructure for online education. There is almost no Internet facility. The development of roads and other modes of transport have been rather sluggish so far. The region, one feels, never got its share of digital connectivity. There is no problem with Governmental intentions in this landlocked hilly area. Digital India campaign is trying to bridge the yawning gap. But still, the present scenario is challenging and worrisome. At present, Internet connectivity to the region is through Mumbai and Chennai. The long distance and complicated hilly area manifolds the problems.

Government has to work really hard for spreading Digital Media Literacy in this region. But these states have not given up. They are struggling with the hope that they will also taste the fruits of Digital revolution one day. It might seem to be a dream beyond comprehension for the time being but the people are hoping for the ray of hope at the end of tunnel. The third Indian International Gateway has been established in Agartala. India invested Rs. 19.14 crore for this Gateway. This cost is very less when we look at the benefits of Internet facility in this sleepy region. The first two International Internet Gateways were set up in Mumbai and Chennai. It has made a big difference in the field of Internet penetration in this hilly terrain. All the other adjoining states have benefited from this. The day is not far when education sector will witness a boom and everything will be available to the Tribal people of this region just at a click. Now telecom players need to cover all the hilly pockets. Providing High speed Internet is the top priority followed by connectivity.

After the implementation of 'Look East Policy' of Congress Government in early 90s, a number of higher educational Institutes were opened in this region. The latest edition to this is the establishment of Regional Campus of Indian Institute of Mass Communication. Efforts have been made for skill development but technical progress is lacking. With more than 90% literacy rate in many North Eastern states, this region has shown its potential. Now the need is to provide Digital and Media Information Literacy to the people of this region. The contribution of private and corporate sector in this regard is required the most. Once this happens, this region will witness unprecedented economic and educational development. Only the Government can't do all this, private sector needs to share its part of responsibility in providing Digital Media Literacy if they want to see this region prosper like other prosperous states. There will be roadblocks in this effort but grit and determination will conquer all the hurdles. With the arrival of Internet, the social media sites, online education, access to easy and speedy information will be available to people. It is not the case that people of this region don't have smart phones but they lack Internet connectivity and knowhow of making the most of technology. Knowledge about making distinction between the use and misuse is necessary. Only after due Digital Media Literacy the people of this region will have access to the treasure of information available on Digital platforms and then they will be able to distinguish between true and fake news and the art of escaping cyber thefts and cyber crime. Of course, geography of the region will continue to ask tough questions but rock determination will help to remove all hurdles.

It has been seen all over the world that when a new technology arrives, it is the youth that gets more fascinated. It is equally true that the youth all over India has so far failed to make a distinction between information and disinformation. Hence to avoid that to happen in this region, the youth needs to be provided literacy about the use and miss use of social media which is overloaded with disinformation, misinformation and fake news. People of the region are asking for their share of Digital India and it must be provided to them. Only then this fascinating region will rub shoulders with other regions of the World and harvest rich dividends that Digital Media provides to humanity.

Conclusion & Summary:

Institutes like Indian Institute of Mass Communication in Mizoram, IITs, IIMs, Sports academies, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, International Sports Stadiums, International Airports, the entry of high speed Internet service providing companies etc are the need of the hour. People of this region are still stucked to Traditional modes of living and education. They need to be provided all the technical facilities which have been provided to the people of technical hubs in India. Along with technical facilities the facility of Internet is imperative for the growth of this region. Becoming modern and hugging the latest technologies by no means mean the death knell of strong traditional cultural roots of this region. But modernity and traditional culture can go hand in hand as it has happened in Punjab. The basic and urgent need is the dissemination of Digital Media Literacy to the people of this region. It may be by way of organizing seminars, conferences, symposium, workshops, Faculty Development Programs, Refresher Courses or village level meetings addressed by technically sound people. This region lagged behind when Print media, Radio and Television arrived in India. But it must not lag behind in case of Internet driven Digital Media which is destined to revolutionized the fortunes of this region in general and people in particular.

REFERENCES:

1. <https://www.indiatodayne.in/perspective/story/digital-media-scene-northeast-india-407771-2020-01-26>
2. <https://www.sentinelassam.com/editorial/digital-media-literacy-need-of-the-hour-636741>
3. <https://nehascope.com/2017/12/28/digital-north-east/>
4. <http://asu.thehoot.org/media-watch/regional-media/redesigning-media-education-in-the-northeast-7004>
5. <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/northeast-india>
6. <https://nehascope.com/2017/12/28/digital-north-east/>