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## The Role Of New Media In Empowering Karnataka's Dalits

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### Abstract

The world has witnessed a commendable new media revolution, expansion of knowledge, and interactive communication. The new media have created virtual communities that have crossed geographical boundaries. Digital, networkable, compressible, and interactive are the basic characteristics of new media technologies. The Internet, in particular, offers the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere in which citizens can engage in well-informed and non-hierarchical debate about their social structures. India has also made commendable progress in communication science and technology. Policymakers have recognized that active participation of underprivileged, marginalized, underserved, and under-represented segments of society, including women and vulnerable groups, is critical for inclusive development. As society shifts towards a knowledge-based and development-oriented society, the critical role of new media in Dalit empowerment becomes clear. The importance of the media in national development is widely acknowledged by media scholars.

**Keywords:** New Media, Inclusive Development, Empowerment of Dalits.

## INTRODUCTION

The way marginalized populations express their identities, organize resistance, and engage in democratic discourse has changed dramatically as a result of the quick development of new communication technologies. Digital platforms have become vital venues for questioning established systems of exclusion in India, where caste still shapes social, political, and economic inequalities. Karnataka offers an important background for analysing the relationship between caste and new media because of its lengthy history of social change and Dalit struggles. Dalits in Karnataka have been able to circumvent mainstream media gatekeeping and produce alternative narratives thanks to new media, which includes social networking sites, digital news portals, blogs, podcasts, and video-sharing platforms. These venues elevate Dalit voices, promote networks of solidarity across communities and regions, and aid in the spread of counter-discourses on caste injustice. New media significantly contributes to the transformation of Dalit political consciousness and cultural expression by providing instruments for self-representation and group organization. By examining how digital spaces support social awareness, political mobilization, and cultural assertion, this study investigates the role of new media in empowering the Dalits of Karnataka. It also looks at the difficulties that come with digital empowerment, such as surveillance, online harassment, and access problems. Using this perspective, the study aims to comprehend how new media serves as a transforming force in the continuous fight for Dalit equality, justice, and dignity rather than only as a technological advancement.

### Salient Features of New Media

The fundamental characteristics of modern media technologies include digital, networkable, compressed, and interactive. In general, "new media" includes the Internet, websites, computer multimedia, video games, augmented reality, CD-ROMs, and DVDs. In actuality, the term "new media" refers to interactive user feedback, creative engagement, and on-demand access to material whenever, wherever, and on any digital device. The creation of fresh, unrestricted content in real time is another characteristic of new media. In the tail end of the 20th century, the new media emerged. A distinct kind of parallel interaction between social developments and computer design was also seen around the world.

The "development of new, digital technology implies a potentially drastic shift in who is in control of information, experience, and resources," according to Shapiro (1990:10). While the "new media" have the technical ability to move in one direction, Neuman (1991) contends that economic and social pressures move in the opposite direction. The development of an international network of interconnected audio, video, and electronic text communications has been witnessed by the populace, blurring the lines between interpersonal and mass communication as well as between public and private communication. Neuman (1991) lists the following qualities of new media:

- ❖ change how geographic distance is interpreted.

- ❖ Permit an enormous expansion in the amount of communication.
- ❖ Give people the option of accelerating communication.
- ❖ Provide possibilities for dialogical interaction.
- ❖ Let previously distinct types of communication to combine and connect.

Manovich listed eight new media ideas, including the connection between cyberculture and new media. New media as digital data controlled by software, new media as a mix of cultural and software conventions, new media as the aesthetics carrying modern communication technologies, new media as met media, new media as parallel articulation of similar ideas, and new media as distribution platforms oriented towards computer technology. These characteristics have produced very similar pictures and spatial configurations.

According to Biocca (2000), there isn't just one type of new media technology; rather, there is a family of intelligent information technologies. Computers have several characteristics, including:

- (a) A medium that is evolving more quickly than traditional media;
- (b) A family of intelligent information technologies;
- (c) Various configurations of input and output devices;
- (d) New interaction algorithms and techniques;
- (e) The combination of multisensory content, various types of interfaces, and various transmission systems for delivering information services;
- (f) Computer intelligence. These characteristics make computers effective communication tools.

### **The Role of New Media in Empowering Karnataka's Dalits**

Social media platforms, blogs, digital news portals, YouTube, podcasts, and messaging apps are examples of new media that have revolutionized how disenfranchised people express their opinions and organize for social change. Dalits have long experienced caste-based discrimination, structural marginalization, and underrepresentation in the political and mainstream media in Karnataka. By facilitating self-representation, political mobilization, cultural assertion, and opposition to prevailing caste narratives, new media has become a potent instrument for Dalit empowerment.

New media, which includes blogs, YouTube channels, digital networks, and social networking sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X), has become a potent instrument for strengthening the Dalit community in Karnataka. Dalits in Karnataka, who have historically been disadvantaged by

mainstream media that frequently ignores or misrepresents their concerns, have used these easily available, inexpensive forums to raise awareness, foster unity, and combat prejudice based on caste.

Dalits may record crimes, share personal stories, and organize protests via social media, which acts as an alternative public realm. Dalit-Bahujan organizations in Karnataka utilize Instagram and Twitter to expose underreported instances, highlight prejudice, and document caste violence using short videos. By connecting regional battles to national movements like #DalitLivesMatter or #JaiBhim, hashtags and internet campaigns raise awareness of Dalit rights. Direct communication and counter-narratives opposing prevailing caste notions are made possible by this digital action, which circumvents biased conventional venues.

Research on Dalit groups in areas like as Shivamogga demonstrates a strong use of new media for political, social, and personal empowerment. Respondents highlight how it promotes political engagement, economic advancement, education, and the elimination of caste prejudice. As demonstrated by online communities and sites devoted to Ambedkarite doctrine, platforms enable networking, which fortifies identity consolidation and solidarity.

Digital forums and YouTube channels offer venues for conversations about Dalit culture, history, and current politics in Karnataka. Influencers and activists reach a larger audience, including the diaspora, by organizing campaigns, sharing experiences, and advocating for justice. These methods democratize representation in spite of obstacles including digital divides, trolling, and algorithmic prejudice.

### **Media Exclusion and Historical Marginalization**

Because upper-caste elites have dominated traditional media in India, Dalit issues have received little attention and are frequently misrepresented. Even though there is a long history of Dalit activities in Karnataka, spearheaded by individuals like the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS) and the followers of B. R. Ambedkar, Dalit viewpoints are frequently ignored in newspapers, television, and movies. Alternative venues where Dalits may share their own stories were desperately needed as a result of this exclusion.

### **Using New Media to Represent Oneself**

Dalits in Karnataka can now avoid the old gatekeepers of print and broadcast media, which have historically neglected or misrepresented Dalit perspectives, thanks to new media. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter/X, YouTube, Instagram, and regional-language blogs, especially those in Kannada, have emerged as vital venues for narrative control and self-expression. These venues are used by Dalit activists, writers, artists, and young people to commemorate community history and accomplishments, tell stories of daily struggle, and record lived experiences of caste prejudice.

Dalits aggressively combat prevailing caste stereotypes that depict them as helpless victims or social dependents using films, postings, poems, and digital storytelling. Rather, the assertion of Dalit

identity based on political awareness, cultural pride, and dignity is made easier by modern media. In addition to empowering individuals, this type of self-representation helps to establish a Dalit counter-public sphere where alternative discourses on caste, equality, and social justice can thrive beyond the confines of mainstream media.

## Objectives

- ❖ To examine how new media platforms (such as social media, blogs, and digital forums) provide a voice to Dalit communities in Karnataka, enabling them to share personal experiences and challenge caste-based discrimination.
- ❖ To analyse the ways in which new media facilitates awareness-raising and education about Dalit rights, Ambedkarite ideology, and social issues specific to Karnataka's Dalit population.
- ❖ To investigate the role of new media in mobilizing Dalit activism, community solidarity, and protests against atrocities in Karnataka.
- ❖ To assess the impact of new media on building identity, pride, and political empowerment among Dalits in Karnataka, including comparisons with traditional media.

## Methodology

### Research Design

In order to investigate how new media platforms support the empowerment of Dalit communities in Karnataka; the study uses a qualitative research design. Because it enables a thorough comprehension of lived experiences, self-representation narratives, and the sociopolitical effects of digital media on marginalized communities, a qualitative method is suitable.

Primary Information comprehensive interviews with Dalit writers, activists, students, and content producers who actively use blogs, Facebook, Twitter/X, YouTube, and other new media platforms. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with young Dalit people to learn about their views on political consciousness, identity creation, and digital empowerment. Themes of resistance, representation, and cultural assertion are examined through content analysis of specific Dalit-run social media pages, YouTube channels, and Kannada-language blogs.

Secondary Information publications, scholarly journals, and research papers about digital activism, new media, and Dalit movements. reports on media representation in Karnataka, caste prejudice, and digital access from governmental and non-governmental organizations. Dalit activism and social movements are documented in news stories and online archives.

## New Media and Dalits

The development of new media, the spread of knowledge, and interactive communication are all admirable. Due to the new media's ability to transcend regional boundaries, societal constraints are no

longer present. Information technology unites individuals, regardless of geography, religion, caste, color, faith, race, or political affiliations. Together, the federal and state governments must expand the use of new media, encourage new media literacy, engage the public in development efforts, thwart corruption in development endeavors, and strengthen the nation's information underprivileged.

The effects of globalization on new media management in general and new media applications in particular have been the subject of extensive research in both India and other countries. The analysis of the literature makes it abundantly evident that no adequate scientific investigations were conducted in India with a focus on Dalit access to and use of digital media. The new communication technologies should be wisely applied in India as tools for development and participatory communication. The government and other stakeholders should assure the thoughtful and active application of new media, including social media, for diverse developmental undertakings in order to promote sustainable, integrated, and inclusive development throughout the nation. To enhance the nation's participatory development process, the Indian National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development should have access to cutting-edge facilities, funding, human capital, functional autonomy, and other privileges.

## **DALIT IDENTITY**

Ambedkar (1891–1966) offered an intellectual foundation for the creation of the Dalit identity in response to the mystics' and social activists' attempts to crystallize the Dalit identity. Ambedkar organized Dalits socially, politically, and intellectually in the wake of the early Dalit movement, which gave the development of the Dalit identity a clear shape. Over the course of his 50-year social life, Ambedkar launched numerous campaigns. As a civil rights issue, Ambedkar's Mahad campaign for the untouchables' access to public water in 1927 was successful. He later rose to prominence as a human rights advocate. Ambedkar subsequently ran for office in separate constituencies. Ambedkar (1891–1966) provided the Dalit identity movement with a philosophical underpinning. Ambedkar taught the Dalits that they have a distinct identity from the Hindus. Even more, he demanded that the Dalits live far from the Hindu community. Ambedkar made a significant socio-cultural contribution to the assertion of the Dalit identity as the first Law Minister and the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Ambedkar gave the Dalit identity a spiritual foundation by advocating Buddhism as an alternative to the illogical Hinduism, which many of his followers adopted. But this constitutional identity is narrow and misses the bigger picture. The status of Lower castes who have converted from Hinduism to another faith frequently does not change, but they are no longer be considered SCs. Moreover, whether they are Christian Dalits, Neo-Buddhist Dalits, or Muslim Dalits, Dalit groups in modern-day India are not all same and each articulates a distinct identity. Thus, the term "Dalit" should not be understood to refer solely to a caste community. Instead, it should be seen as a progressive ideology that aids the Dalit movement in

achieving its goals and as a symbol of transformation and liberation. It is becoming more common to add the suffix "Dalit" to identify someone who adheres to specific beliefs, such as equality and humanism.

### **Breaking the Silence of Mainstream Media**

Traditional mainstream media in Karnataka has long been criticized for underrepresenting Dalit voices or portraying Dalit issues through stereotypical and patronizing lenses. New media has disrupted this monopoly by allowing Dalits to bypass traditional gatekeepers. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and regional digital news portals have enabled Dalit activists, writers, and journalists to narrate their own experiences in Kannada and English.

Dalit-run digital platforms and independent media initiatives now report on caste atrocities, land rights issues, educational discrimination, and labour exploitation that often go unnoticed by mainstream outlets. By documenting lived realities in real time, new media has become a tool of counter-narrative, challenging dominant caste discourses.

### **Political Mobilization and Advocacy**

New media has played a crucial role in mobilizing Dalit communities across Karnataka, especially among youth. Online campaigns, hashtags, live-streamed protests, and digital petitions have amplified grassroots movements. Social media has helped mobilize support for issues such as reservation policies, implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and justice for victims of caste-based violence.

Digital platforms also enable rapid dissemination of information, helping activists coordinate protests, raise legal awareness, and pressure state institutions. Dalit leaders and organizations increasingly use new media to engage directly with policymakers and the public, reducing dependence on traditional political intermediaries.

### **Cultural Assertion and Identity Formation**

New media has become a significant space for cultural expression and identity assertion among Karnataka's Dalits. YouTube channels, Instagram pages, and podcasts celebrate Dalit history, literature, folk traditions, and revolutionary figures such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Kannada Dalit literature, poetry, and music have found new audiences through digital platforms.

This cultural assertion challenges caste hierarchies by reclaiming pride in Dalit identity and resisting centuries of stigmatization. Digital storytelling has enabled intergenerational dialogue, connecting older struggles with contemporary aspirations, and fostering a shared sense of belonging and resistance.

## Education, Awareness, and Knowledge Sharing

By filling in the gaps left by conventional institutions and mainstream media, new media is essential to the educational empowerment of Dalits in Karnataka. Dalit educators, activists, and community members can share information about constitutional rights, government scholarships, competitive exams (like UPSC and KPSC), and career assistance through platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and specialized websites like Round Table India and Dalit Camera. For first-generation Dalit learners, who frequently lack access to metropolitan coaching facilities or familial networks, this is especially important. Dalit youth in rural and semi-urban Karnataka can now prepare for higher education and career prospects thanks to the proliferation of online study groups, live sessions on Ambedkarite doctrine, and mentorship programs.

In order to combat delays or rejections in state programs, Ambedkarite internet communities, for example, regularly exchange resources on reservations, SC/ST scholarships, and affirmative action policies (as emphasized in reports of Karnataka's scholarship payout troubles). Social media campaigns educate people about political rights and atrocity legislation (such as the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act) by breaking down complex legal requirements into easy language in Kannada. This encourages political and legal knowledge, enabling Dalits to take part in elections, submit complaints, and advocate for causes.

These projects challenge Brahmanical narratives in education, foster communal togetherness, and democratize knowledge in the setting of Karnataka, where rural caste inequality still exists and digital penetration is increasing. However, obstacles like online abuse and the digital divide restrict reach, highlighting the necessity of focused digital literacy initiatives. In general, modern media strengthens Dalits' ability to advocate for themselves and move up the social ladder by converting passive marginalization into active empowerment.

## Limitations of Digital Empowerment

Social media has undoubtedly improved the visibility of Dalits in public debate, but there are some lessons to be learned from other countries' experiences with digital empowerment that should be taken into account.

One of these lessons contends that selective access to the digital world can elevate some voices above others. The spread of social media has largely had no impact on Dalits. Even now, three-fourths of Dalits live in rural India, and among those who live in cities, many do not have access to the internet. Dalits who have access to technology are more likely to live in cities and have greater socioeconomic position. With the introduction of less expensive smart phones, these restrictions should disappear.

Although their benefits, digital ties have a short lifespan; this is another important lesson to keep in mind. People are unlikely to be able to sustain collective action on a regular basis unless they interact in person and develop personal relationships. The Dalit agenda is therefore informed by digital collectives,

but they cannot take the place of community-based organizations. Hence, Dalit political movements, activists, politicians, and parties will continue to be at the forefront of Dalit politics.

### **Suggestions**

- ❖ The government and civil society organizations should work to reduce the digital divide by improving internet connectivity in rural and semi-urban areas of Karnataka.
- ❖ Government bodies, universities, and NGOs should provide grants, fellowships, and platforms for Dalit journalists, writers, and creators.
- ❖ Social media platforms must implement stricter policies to address caste-based abuse, hate speech, and trolling. Legal awareness programs should also educate Dalit users about cyber laws and reporting mechanisms.
- ❖ Dalit movements and organizations in Karnataka should strategically integrate new media with on-ground activism. Live streaming protests, sharing digital archives, and coordinating campaigns online can enhance collective action.
- ❖ New media platforms can be used to share information about scholarships, competitive exams, government schemes, and employment opportunities specifically relevant to Dalit students and job seekers.

### **Findings**

- ❖ New media has enabled Dalits in Karnataka to represent themselves without dependence on mainstream media institutions.
- ❖ Digital platforms have functioned as alternative public spheres where Dalit issues are discussed from within the community.
- ❖ New media has significantly contributed to political consciousness among Dalit youth.
- ❖ Digital tools have enhanced coordination among Dalit organizations and activists across rural and urban Karnataka. New media has amplified grassroots struggles, helping local issues gain statewide and national visibility.
- ❖ Platforms such as YouTube, blogs, and online magazines have increased the reach of Dalit literature, folk traditions, and cultural expressions in Kannada.

### **Conclusion**

In the new millennium, new media application assumes great significance from the points of view of participatory communication and development. There is a visible digital divide across the globe which has impeded the development of the mankind. The role of new media in the processes of social change and economic development is now widely recognized by the scholars and policy makers all over the globe. India has achieved commendable progress in the field of new media management. The crucial role of new media in the empowerment of Dalits becomes clear since the society moves towards a knowledge – based

and development – oriented society. Ambedkar fought for the integrated development of India and empowerment of women and weaker sections. He had firmly believed that social inequality would jeopardize political freedom and democracy. He had also called upon the media to function as angel guardians of public interest. His perspective on the role of media in national development is widely acknowledged as highly progressive by the media scholars.

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