How the smartphone is being used as a medium of expression by women's population of rural India, especially the hill region of Uttarakhand, India

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ABSTRACT

Expression has been a natural quality of human beings since ancient times. Whether it is a woman or a man, he finds an opportunity to express his inner thoughts in one way or the other. The way of presentation of expression creates different forms of art like music, singing, dance, painting, sculpture, writing, playing and all other forms of art through which we express our expression. This study will be helpful to understand how the expression of rural women of Uttarakhand is being recorded on social media platforms by recording them through smartphones, as well as how the user friendly technology of smartphones has made them so popular. "We define self- expression as the expression of one's thoughts and feelings and these expressions can be accomplished in words, choices or through actions. (Kim & Ko, 2007)." (1) Expressing oneself through an action then that act an art form is formed and the artist is the expressive. Social media, especially Facebook, has emerged as a platform to make the expression of such performers public.

Keywords: (Smartphone, self-expression, mobile social media, technology, rural women, communication modes, photography, Videography, democracy)

INTRODUCTION

Smartphone's versatility, easy availability and pairing with the Internet has made mobile phones a modern and exceptionally accessible machine companion and supporter. The scientific revolution of information and technology has opened the way for limitless possibilities in every sphere of life, bringing the era to a new level. This device has given urban and rural consumers equal opportunity to see and know the world. Its virtual world has ensured space for every consumer. It is not evolving day by day, technological achievement has left behind age-group, gender-disparities and geographical disparities, which is establishing a new society by disposing of the complexities of socio-cultural traditions and customs. Presently, we have become citizens of two worlds; Virtual world and a real phenomenal world. Smartphones have become the most prominent means of expressing oneself and in different spaces of the virtual world. And when it came to the hands of those, who were still out of reach of traditional means of communication, and wanted to create their expression, art, hobbies and identities, for them the smartphone is like a boon. The participation of people from rural background and adopters in this is remarkable. Today, on various social media

bases, their expression is being seen in videos, songs, dances and other forms of expression. During this research study, Facebook's page created by users from Uttarakhand and audio-visual presentations posted by other Facebook users suggest that the magic machine in the palm has opened the way for the women of Uttarakhand to get out of the mind. It also became the main means of self-expression of the people. Videos of women interacting with each other is depicting relaxing moments during paddy transplantation or eye-catching dance and melodious folk songs from rural women during cutting grass for fodder and wood in the forest are attracting social media users. Smartphone which have now become a media tool as well are carving out an important role in the new social media world. *(2)*

More than 6 billion people in the world use mobile phones, making it the most common and rapidly adopted communication in history. This development has impacted internet usage.(3) Farman (2015), in his study, projected that within the next decade, more people worldwide would access broadband internet through mobile devices than they do via desktop and laptop. Jones et al. (2013) defined mobile media as a media content consisting of audio, image, and video (3). A critical feature of mobile media as compared to classical mass communication is the back-staging of social organisations as producers and distributors of information to users of mobile phones (Wei, 2013). As such, mobile communication represents a new paradigm of human interaction with mobile media as user-generated communicative space (Watkins et al., 2012). That is captured with or shared through a mobile interface or device. (4)

Objectives
The study explores the smart phones and its audio-visual recording tools usage among rural population specially women in Uttarakhand both for self-expression and other communication forms.
The study attempts to:
•Find out the facts of behind popularity of smart phone and its tools used by rural women in India
•Explore the pattern of mobile consumption by rural women of Uttarakhand, India
•Explore the purpose of recording contents by rural smartphone consumers in India.
•Identify the type of audio- visual contents created by rural women of hill area in Uttarakhand, India;
•Examine the impacts of mobiles' audio-visual tools and social media integration on personality and behaviour of women in Uttarakhand, India;
•Find out the suitable and friendly space for creating the audio-visual products using smart phone comfortably by women of hill area of Uttarakhand, India;
•To find out how the audio-visual contents captured by common consumers become information sources to main stream media.

Research design
The methodology of this study is descriptive and analytical in nature and the credibility of the study is based on the experience and analysis of secondary material (articles, research papers, case studies related to research on the Internet, audio-visual presentations uploaded on social sites).

Finding
The present study is based on review of literature, including articles, newspapers, magazines,

material published on the Internet as well as audio-visuals contents related to the study. Audio-video contents being posted on various social media groups, YouTube, Facebook. Further analysed and reviewed audio-visuals contents related to the study as; the popularity of the smartphone, simple technology - mechanism to operate, the tools of audio-visual recording, community communication. The results which came out on its conclusion are mentioned below.

• User friendly technology of the smartphone (you push a button; the rest of the work will be done by the smart device.)
In the past, capturing photographs, whether a still image or a moving image, recorded a video or snap, was a task of specialized technical skill. In which the camera operator was required to be knowledgeable about the deep technical nuances of the camera. (5) For which photography or videography had to take special training along with time to learn it. Before digital era of capturing, this recording device was considered to be an item of use only for professional people.

But in the year 2000, this camera device became a part of cell phones. Samsung revolutionized the world of photography and videography by first fitting a digital camera with the SCH-V200 model cell phone (6). The journey of technological advancement of the smartphone of these 20- 22 years has added new dimensions to the visual media, and has not only expanded its boundaries by breaking many restrictions but also created a new definition of it. *India is the second-largest and fastest growing smartphone market in the world (Ho, 2017) and figures on social media use there suggest a strong potential for selfie making and sharing. According to Facebook, India had the largest number of monthly users of the social media platform of any single country – with up to 241 million monthly users – as of July 2017 (a million more than the United States; Kemp, 2017).(7) Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, had as many as 120 million monthly users in India as of February 2019, with daily users estimated at 60 to 80 million (Ananth and Sharma, 2019).(8) 'We think of [India] as a market with a lot of promise and excitement', Instagram co-founder Mike Krieger stated in a 2017 interview (Sharma, 2017). 'So as we draw up a path from 800 million to 900 million to a billion users, we see India as being a very key market for us'. (9).* To make the smartphone a consumer item, manufacturing companies around the world started doing R&D day and night to add some new or updated features to it. The addition of the camera feature with the phone proved to be the most revolutionary step not only for consumers but also for manufactures, and then the Internet duo put people in the hands of a device they had been waiting for.

But a special reason for its attraction around the world became its user-friendly design.
First sight smart phone looks complicated but, its features are designed in such a way that one can easily use this device with a couple of practices. Capturing photos, recording videos and sounds, as if it is like a left hand job. The phone also became the operating trainer, without reading a user manual booklet. That's why it's SMART (10). "A smartphone is a mobile phone that includes advanced functionality beyond making phone calls and sending text messages. Most smartphones have the capability to display photos, play videos, check and send e-mail, and surf the Web." **Before this digital –semiconductor advancement in celluloid based process, people wanted photography, but photographic equipment was a hassle for them. The smartphone took away this fear of equipment from user's mind, no more nerve-racking about controlling the light and proper exposure of the visuals. In automatic mode, the AI system of the smartphone becomes their camera

assistant and guides them in taking photos in all kinds of light conditions. Today every smartphone is a photo technician in itself. And with the help of this, every smartphone user is able to easily capture videos and photos. Its user friendly technology has carved a niche for a new universal consumer group by breaking the norms of literacy- illiteracy, urban- rural, gender-different background. (11, 12)

Today it is like a lock and key kept in every household. Lock is a machine in itself, but common people use it easily in every home.

- **Right to Equality :- Democratization of Information;**

Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India guarantees to all its citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression. The law states that, "all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression". The freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) includes the right to express one's views and opinions at any issue through any medium, e.g. by words of mouth, writing, printing, picture, film, movie etc. It thus includes the freedom of communication and the right to propagate or publish opinion. But this right is subject to reasonable restrictions being imposed under Article 19(2). Free expression cannot be equated or confused with a license to make unfounded and irresponsible allegations against the judiciary (13). Right to equality is a special feature of any democracy. Smartphones have given citizens equal opportunities to use its features as consumers. User goal by creating audio visual content, whether it is self-expression or a sense of information dissemination, like a production crew, **the smartphone has empowered the core of democracy's right to equality by giving everyone an equal opportunity.**

- **Smartphone penetration in rural areas.**

A survey by The Final Annual Status of Education Report revealed the fact that the availability of smartphones in rural areas of India showed a rapid increase in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. **In November 2021, the biennial Annual Status of Education Report (Aser) survey noted that the availability of smartphones in rural India saw a sharp rise in effect of the covid-19 pandemic. It stated that while smartphone availability in rural India was 36.5% in 2018, the figure rose to 67.6% in 2021 (14, 15)

- **Popularity among rural women also.**

If we look at India, rural women are also far ahead among the users of smartphones. User friendly technology of smartphones has made it a special item for rural women.

A significant outcome of the increased use of smartphones in rural India has been the freedom and empowerment it has offered women. An estimated 200 million women in rural India are illiterate but due to the availability and recent access to smartphones in rural areas, plenty of women can now make use of applications enabling them to communicate using audio and images, without requiring them to be able to read or write. (16)

A video in which a group of hill women who have gone to the forest to cattle's fodder are seen performing a dance based on Krishna Leela (Based on Lord Krishna's Life). Other women among the group have also become participants of the dance. In this ambience of forest environment, a woman is seen as Krishna (Lord Krishna, a Hindu Mythological Character) and one as Radha (Female Companion of lord Krishna), wearing a crown of leaves. Two women are meticulously and confidently recording all this on their smartphones. (17) Self-expression of women in a video presentation as dance is captured in smart phone. The special observation in this scene is that women are conscious of the phone's camera. Being in front of the camera, she presents her dance

moves with dignity, in an effort that she remains in the covering area of the camera lens without any hesitation, shyness and fear of the camera.(18) In another AV presentation, the woman is seen singing a song in her melodious voice, giving a touching description of life with the day to day struggles and agony of the harsh mountain terrain. The women sitting next to each other, getting emotional, are seen making their connection with the lyrics of the song. Earlier these folk songs were often heard in the forest while collecting fodder and wood. Now women have kept their smart phones with them whenever they get a chance and enable to record to such these expressions. (19).

In next video post on Facebook, a woman is seen working in the field, recording and narrating the activities of her surroundings with a smart phone, while also introducing the names of other women in front of the camera. All the women seen in the video are seen speaking with confidence in front of the camera. She ends the video by saying her name as the reporter and the camera person, copying exactly a **press reporter**. (20)

- **Comfort zone**

Most of the performances were recorded by women outside the village limits. Agriculture fields, pastures, forests, these are the places rural woman visits daily for her routine work, where there is no crowd of other people of the village. This is women's own environment. This place is like a comfort zone for them. In his comfort zone, a person can basically do whatever he/she wants without any hesitation, be it an expression in front of the camera. The fear of camera-equipped also goes away when someone stay in the comfort zone. And this is the reason why the women appearing in all the presentations discussed are openly expressing their instinct character. *Expressions such as 'being in one's comfort zone' or 'I'm comfortable with that' exemplify the extent to which the concept has become accepted in the English language. Psychologists and behaviourists have their own meaning of the term but when it comes to performance, it is relatively straightforward to construct a definition that encapsulates the principle elements: The comfort zone is a behavioural state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviours to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk. (21)*

- **Mobile social media as a source of information.**

A social media impact survey, conducted among 165 journalists, editors and bloggers by ING Netherlands(ING News:2014) has found that half of the journalists use social media as main source of information even though one-third of the journalists believe that social media posts are not reliable(# SMING 14). Journalists mostly use social media to find out what people are talking about. 60 percent of the respondents feel less bound by traditional journalistic rules on social media and share opinions openly. (22) In the geographical conditions of Uttarakhand, it is not possible that the main-stream media (TV, newspapers) can keep their own representatives in every area for news. News events can happen anywhere at any time. If there is an eyewitness to any such incident, then it becomes a device to record video or capture photos of the smartphone. Either it is a natural calamity or road accident, adulteration of consumer goods or incidents of any type of corruption. It has been observed many times that if any natural disaster happened in remote area in Uttarakhand, the people from the nearby village transmit the news through the smart phone. The communication of the news has not only saved the lives of the local people, has also alerted the disaster management team. On February 7, 2021, when the glacier broke at Raini village near Joshimath, district Chamoli in Uttarakhand, the horror of that tragedy was first captured by the smartphone and the pictures taken from it became news on all the global mass media platforms. (23)

Conclusion

With the expansion of the Internet and mobile phones, a wonderful social revolution is visible in information transmission which makes the world a global village and at the same time it has connected the people of the village with the city and the world, now together on all the movements happening in the world. People from all over the place are keeping an eye. This Internet-based web has taken a massive rise to break the captive limits of traditional media, which is constantly striving to scale new heights. It transformed from a phone to a smart phone with its adaptive use in every social structure and situation. Along with chat, the smartphone has also established its lenses to witness this phenomenal world. Across with your two eyes, you also have a third electronic camera lens eye that can see, hear, and most importantly keep a recording of these events. It was past when only media professional and experts have the right over photos, videos or sound recordings. This study shows that any smart phone consumer can not only generate content but also broadcast contents to the audience, listeners and readers in one click. A new democracy is being proved. It can simply be gauged from the increasing consumption of smart mobile phones day by day. This research study also found that beside as a means of freeing tiredness or entertainment, this smart device has also opened the window of artistic self-expression, where there is no hindrance in their expression and presentation. Who she/he is from inside, in her/his true form the smartphone may have given them this opportunity. Study also revealed that one of the great features of smart phone is that it does not require special training to operate, its user friendly feature made it dear to every heart and filled everyone with confidence, for all, equal, like a true democracy. Along with rights are responsibilities, there are complications that should be debated, but a clear side of this is the pictures, words and unheard voices seen on social platforms, which the traditional mass media could rarely give space to by crossing their boundaries.

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