

# **Social Media as a Tool of Communication, Information-exchange and Social Welfare during the Covid-19 Crisis**

**Aparna Shekhawat**

## **Abstract**

Social Media has emerged as the most popular and fastest tool of communication and information exchange during Covid-19 crisis. Various social media platforms like facebook, whatsapp, youtube, twitter, instagram etc have become the most popular medium for social interaction, posting status, sharing messages, pictures and videos of special occasions as well as day-today happenings and, spreading awareness and delivering fastest news updates. These platforms are also being used for gaming, accessing music and videos, online shopping, banking, dating, maps, health and fitness, and the list goes on. But during Covid-19 crisis, Social media has acted as a game changer in many incidences. These mediums acted as the medium for social welfare and provided moral support to one and all when there was a lockdown and everyone's life was at stake. WhatsApp seems to beat all social media platforms during lockdown for social interaction, sharing messages, spreading awareness and delivering fastest news updates. Many people on whatsapp groups arranged funds and different kinds of help for needy people at their own level.

**Keywords:** Communication; Covid-19 Crisis; Social Media; Social Welfare; Whatsapp.

## **Methodology**

This review paper aims to highlight the positive impact of technology on society and discusses the increasing popularity of social media platforms with reference to the pandemic period (Covid-19 crisis) . The paper reveals the statistics of popularity of these social media platforms especially whatsapp in recent years. It discusses how these social media platforms

have emerged as the most popular tools of communication and information exchange among all age-groups. The paper also showcased the contributions of social media platforms and how these platforms emerged as a hero during pandemic period. Lastly, it also discusses some limitations of these platforms.

## **Introduction**

Social Media has emerged as the most powerful tool of communication and information exchange these days. Today, various platforms of social media like facebook, whatsapp, youtube, twitter, instagram etc are popular for social interaction, posting status, sharing messages, pictures and videos of special occasions as well as day-today happenings and, spreading awareness and delivering fastest news updates. These platforms are also being used for gaming, accessing music and videos, online shopping, banking, dating, maps, health and fitness, and the list goes on.

Today Social media is not limited to the youngsters but it has become the choice of each and every class and age group, even professionals are also using it for business communication & marketing. Thus, Social media has emerged as a global communications medium and also encouraging citizen journalism in political, social, and economic matters and during natural disasters and others matters of concern for the society.

There is a saying that information is power and this power and platform has been given by social media platforms where exchange of information and messages is directly from the horse's mouth. Now the people are fully equipped with information and there is no mediator who can misguide them or deform the messages for their personal interest. **Digital 2020 reports** published in association with **Hootsuite** suggest that digital, mobile and social media have become inseparable part of our everyday lives. Around 4.5 billion people use internet around the world and there are 3.80 billion social media users in Jan 2020 and this number is increasing constantly. More than 5.19 billion people use mobiles and around 89% users use mobile phones for social networking apps which is quite interesting fact as games, music and video, shopping, banking, map, dating, health and fitness all comes later in their preference list.

## **Social Media statistics in India**

According to Statista.com, data published on Feb 11, 2020 – social media users in India in 2018 were 326.1 and by 2019 the number

---

has reached to around 330 million. It is expected to be around 448 million by the year 2023.

In India, 290 million active social media users access social networks through their mobile (as per Hootsuite-we are social report)

According to talkwalkers.com, 70% of the Indians are active social media users. About 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Indians are using this new media. Majority use it for social interaction and sharing their messages.

As per the data published in The Hindu, on an average Indians spend 2.4 hours on social media every day which is slightly lower than global average of 2.5 hrs per day.

Watsapp, FB and Twitter are the popular social media platforms. Also instagram, linkedin, snapchat are also attractive some users.

Facebook has 241 million active users in India which is the highest than any other country. As per Investopedia.

### **Whatsapp has emerged as the new hero**

As per we are social report 2020 WhatsApp Messenger comes on the top in the global ranking of top mobile apps during the year 2019. Facebook, Facebook Messenger, We Chat, Instagram and Tiktok all other social platforms are lagging behind. Among all social media platforms, Facebook used to be the most popular medium for social networking 2-3 years back, but today it seems that watsapp has emerged as the new hero and even older age group people are getting used to this medium. All types of information, messages, videos and pictures can be shared easily through this app within few seconds without any hassle and that is why people are getting used to it. **Watsapp users in India are around 400 million which is increasingly taking over other social platforms.** As per Whatsapp countrywise user statistics, India has the most watsapp users- 400 million. WhatsApp has 1.5 billion active users in 180 countries. 500 million put watsapp status daily and every day more than 65 million messages are sent through watsapp.

During corona virus outbreak, entire nation was in lockdown and during this emergency situation, all social media platforms are serving as the popular tools of communication for the entire nation along with the traditional mediums but watsapp has its special role. People were com-

municating and staying in touch with their family members, friends and colleagues through this medium and asking about their well-being on messenger, voice and video calls service. They were getting every minute updates about the current status of the pandemic and information regarding government strategies during the crisis time. They were getting awareness about the disease and the precautions to stay safe and later are being informed about vaccination and other developments.

During lockdown period and Corona crisis, this platform has been serving as a medium to encourage citizens to come forward for help. Many people on whatsapp groups have arranged funds and different kinds of help for needy people at their own level. It is developing and encouraging human values and sensitivity during these tough times. People are getting updates, help and social security whenever and wherever required with the help of this platform. Also citizen journalism is quite active these days. People are keeping an eye on all wrong practices and mismanagement by the authorities or even in the community itself. At the same time, it provided some humour, entertainment and relaxation to the people during this critical period by the way of jokes, satire, light and positive messages being circulated and forwarded by the people.

### **Contributions of Social Media**

**Power to express** – Common man has got the power to express his feelings and react on the matters of social concern. Whatsapp becoming a popular choice and easy access medium, people can communicate their message, idea, experience or any feeling through this medium. It has given a power to a common man to express his voice and feelings. This platform has made the democracy work in real terms as it is increasing the people's participation in all matters of national and social importance on which common man had no say few years back.

**Constantly Connected society** - Thanks to the social media to help people stay tuned with their friends, family and even with the larger community. Today, the tweets and status of politicians, actors and other celebrities make them connected with their well-wishers and followers and they are forwarded and circulated on other platforms like whatsapp and fb. Every information is coming directly from the person concerned and there is no need of spokespersons or mediators. This direct communication has empowered the society. It is in a way integrating our society and giving it a power to unite and speak for the concerned issues together. This constant connection is empowering the society as well as the nation.

**Active Netizens-** Social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram makes common people aware about each and every move around the globe which let the active netizens be a part of all these activities and they give their reactions and comments on the same. Thus, people consider themselves active in the society. At the same time, people have got platforms to give their reactions and raise their voice on some misdeeds and anti-social acts. It works as a channel to pressurize government and administration to work for the good of the people. Also aware the people about the government schemes so that they can get benefitted by them.

**Social invigilator-** Social media is serving as a social invigilator as it is keeping an eye on the administration and authorities and helping common people to raise their voice against any ill-doing or corruption and carrying out social campaigns against them. Social vigilance is very much required in such a large populated nation and whatsapp with its increasing number of users creating this environment of social vigilance by allowing people raise their voice and express themselves.

**Diluting the age bar -** Social media mediums and networking sites are limited to a particular age group especially youngsters and some concentration is of middle aged group but whatsapp is not limited to any particular age group. People of all age group except kids are accessing this medium very easily and are getting connected with their family, friends and colleagues via pictures, status, exchange of messages, video chats etc. This medium has now removed age barrier and even older age group people are finding it a good medium to stay connected with their peers and family members.

**Extension of family and friend circle-** Practically in today's busy world, it is quite difficult to maintain relations or friendship with such a large circle of family and friends but with the help of social media, it has become possible to stay in touch with all those friends and family who are staying in the different parts of the nation and the world. There are many such friends, ex- colleagues and distant relatives with whom we have not met since long but still we can be in touch with them via social media platforms. It is really a boon for our social life as it has extended our family and social circle by bringing people together. It is observed that people have made their school friends or ex-colleagues or family groups on whatsapp and are in constant touch with each other wishing them birthdays and special occasions, sharing their lives' good and bad and re-living their old good days.

**Boosting Business-** These social networking apps and sites are working as wonderful marketing platforms for various small to big business entities. They are helping them to connect with their consumers and creating as well as boosting their brand value. Whatsapp is also playing an important role in branding and developing organisational image and maintaining good relations.

**Effective communication tool for professionals and students-** Almost all organisations have made their whatsapp group on which they communicate the information and important messages to all the employees. Even the schools and universities have added their students in the separate groups to share messages, assignments and educational videos with them especially during lockdown these groups are working very effectively.

### **Success of Social Media especially whatsapp during Pandemic period -**

During Covid-19 crisis, Social media has acted as a game changer in many incidences. These mediums acted as the medium for social welfare and provided moral support to one and all when there was a lockdown and everyone's life was at stake. It has gathered the entire nation so that one can help each other and morally support the victims during this pandemic period.

WhatsApp seems to beat all social media platforms during lockdown for social interaction, sharing messages, spreading awareness and delivering fastest news updates. Social media during this pandemic period also volunteered welfare works. Many people on whatsapp groups arranged funds and different kinds of help for needy people at their own level. It encouraged human values and sensitivity during the tough times. People got medicines and hospitals related updates, help whenever and wherever required with the help of social media platforms. These social media platforms brought the entire nation at one platform and it appeared as if the entire nation is one family facing the pandemic together. Such a unity and oneness, was remarkable. Also citizen journalism got quite active those days. People started keeping check on any misbehaviour or malpractices with corona victims.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020 PM Modi requested people of nation to thank the doctors and other frontline workers serving people during covid 19 pandemic by banging thalis and clapping. This message was widely circulated via social media especially whatsapp and its impact and success was amazing. Similar incident took place on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 when Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi urged people of India to light diya, candles, torch at 9. Pm in order to spread positivity among citizens as a light of hope to come out of this crisis. Entire nation was standing as one in their balconies and terraces. The success of both the incidents was appreciated all over the globe. Even the traditional mediums of communication started following and communicating with people via whatsapp to get updates on this event. This might not worked to eradicate corona but boosted morale of the entire nation that we all are together in this crisis.

During covid 19 pandemic, whatsapp served as a medium of message circulation among the users regarding this pandemic's updates and awareness. It became a major medium among the people to interact with friends and family through pics, messages and video calls and to get updated about each other's well-being especially during 21 days lockdown when nobody could move from one place to another in the country.

Earlier also, in 2014 also, Modi used social media platforms and directly communicated with voters and the result was majority of social media users got swept away in the wave of Modi. Even traditional media completely changed their opinion and started following social media trends. Then, JNU incident was more highlighted on social media rather than any other news agency which later integrated the entire country to speak for the nation and stand against those who are traitors.

We can also quote Anna Hazare's social movement against corruption as a good example of social media's success when India against corruption facebook page got more than one lakh likes.

**Some Limitations-** Every coin has two sides. Apart from the above mentioned positive impacts, these popular platforms have some limitations and drawbacks too. When the messages, and videos are created and circulated by people without any authority's intervention, there are chances of their being morphed and lack of authenticity. This way sometimes fake messages and videos are circulated by some anti-social or anti-national elements which can bring danger to the nation as well as society's harmony. **As per survey report of The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism** 56% of the people are concerned and distrustful about fake content on the internet which is 54% up than the previous year. **Global web Index report** says 64% internet users are worried about the security of their data on internet.

Also there is a high risk of increased internet addiction, psychological

disorders and increased physical inactivity among individuals especially amongst youngsters who are replacing social media with face to face interactions, family meetings and get together which can affect them mentally as well as physically. These digital tools and interactive technologies are playing a significant role in the lives of youth specially and are providing risk as well as benefits both.

With regards to these dangers, there are some restrictions imposed by govt. and cyber crime cell in order to control the spread of fake or morphed information. Recently, all state's and central government issued orders to give explanation against all those whatsapp group admins or users who found spreading any wrong information but still strict actions are very much required in a country with such a huge population of 1.38 billion people.

Whatsapp Global Chief Will Cathcart also declared their partnership with Indian School Public Policy to bring privacy centric design workshops to help policy makers in order to boost positive impact of technology on society.

### **Works Cited**

- Haryal.V.(2011). Social media simplified, Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan
- Hendrick.J.(2012).Social Media: Usage and Impact, United Kingdom: Lexington Books.
- Murthy. D.(2012).Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter age, U.K: Wiley Publishers.
- Saxena.M.(2012). Issues of Communication Development and Society, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers.
- Subramanian.K.(2010). The Digital Youth: the role of media in development, New York: Springer science and business media.
- [economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/govt-preparing-new-rules-for-social-media-platforms-to-give-few-hours-to-clear-of-fensive-posts/](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/govt-preparing-new-rules-for-social-media-platforms-to-give-few-hours-to-clear-of-fensive-posts/)
- [www.fortunly.com](http://www.fortunly.com)
- [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)
- [www.talkwalker.com](http://www.talkwalker.com)
- [techcrunch.com/2019/07/26/whatsapp-india-users-400-million/](http://techcrunch.com/2019/07/26/whatsapp-india-users-400-million/)
- [www.wearesocial.com>2020](http://www.wearesocial.com>2020)