



E-ISSN: 2708-4469
P-ISSN: 2708-4450
IJAMCJ 2023; 4(2): 07-11
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www.masscomjournal.com
Received: 05-05-2023
Accepted: 09-06-2023

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Youtubers from rural Bengal are winning hearts of millions of netizens: A study on transforming rural livelihood

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27084450.2023.v4.i2a.64>

Abstract

Bengal being agro-based economy, agriculture is the major source of income among the rural folks. Those with hectares/acres of land, employ other landless villagers to work in their field on payment of minimum wages. Thus, landless villagers (youth) with no other major source of income, face a hardship to sustain in villages as there is rarely other scope of work left in villages other to earn livelihood. Due to lack of employment in villages, the trend of migration to big cities for labour job, mainly in construction sites, hotels, factories etc. is prevailing. However, the situation is again showing a gradual shift and the pattern of earning livelihood is changing with the easy access of new media in rural parts of Bengal. Launch of Digital India campaign in the year 2015 has ushered in electrification and internet connectivity in the remote villages of the country. Smartphone and social media usage has increased to a great extent among villagers. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Messengers are the widely used applications these days. Though most of them enjoy these applications as a source of entertainment, many have made these apps a source to earn their livelihood sitting at home. YouTubers from rural Bengal are winning hearts of millions of netizens direct from their remote village. They are not migrating to cities, nor working as labours in fields. They have created their own identity through creative contents in YouTube platforms. In this paper, it has been described how the rural Bengal youths have made YouTubing as their source of livelihood.

Keywords: Rural livelihood, new media, youtube, youtuber, digital India campaign

Introduction

Bengal being an agro-based economy, agriculture is the major source of income among the rural folks. Those with hectares of land employ other landless villagers to work in their field on payment of minimum wages. Working in fields does not offer a regular income as cultivation is a seasonal affair and remains off for certain period in a year. There are other districts of Bengal where weaving is a great source of income. Those who do not possess land for cultivation, work as weavers, but do not earn a handsome income to meet their basic needs.

Thus, landless villagers face a hardship to sustain in villages. Since last decade, a trend has been noticed among them to migrate to big cities for labour job, mainly in construction sites, hotels, factories etc. They lead a very difficult life in cities with no proper shelter-clean water-proper meals. Somehow, they survive and try to save money from their daily wages which is bit more than they earn in their villages.

Launch of digital India campaign

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana [DDUGJY] (earlier known as Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana) completed electrification programme on 28, April, 2018 with electrification of Leisang village in Manipur.

Rural Electrification Corporation is the Nodal Agency for implementation of DDUGJY. Under this scheme, Ministry of Power has sanctioned 921 projects to electrify 1,21,225 un-electrified villages, intensive electrification of 5,92,979 partially electrified villages and provide free electricity connections to 397.45 lakh BPL rural households (retrieved from www.recindia.nic.in/ddugjy).

The trend of rural livelihood generation is again showing a gradual shift with the easy access of new media in rural parts of Bengal. Launch of Digital India campaign in the year 2015 has ushered in electrification and internet connectivity in the remote villages of the country, including Bengal. Smartphone and social media usage has increased to a great extent among villagers. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Messengers are the widely used applications these days. Though most of them enjoy these applications as a source of entertainment, many have chosen these to earn their livelihood sitting at home.

YouTube

According to Wikipedia, Google owns the internet video site YouTube. It receives the second-highest volume of traffic worldwide. Every day, viewers watch over one billion hours of YouTube videos, and every minute, hundreds of hours of new video content are added to the site.

According to The Economic Times, in June of 2018 Over 400 hours of new content are uploaded to Youtube every minute, giving its 400 million or more monthly active Indian users an endless supply of engaging videos to watch. Indian YouTube content producers have recognised this, and as a result, native material is currently quite popular with Indian users, particularly videos of music and dance performances.

Vidooly, a leading video analytics marketing company analysed the Indian user viewership behaviour on Youtube across 9 most popular categories in the last 6 months namely Style, Vlogs, Entertainment, Gaming, Education, Automobiles, Travel, Animals and Science/Technology to reveal the following insights. (Retrieved from <https://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com/>)

Only 3.5% of the country's population was YouTube's audience when it first launched in India in 2008. The number has risen to almost 20% as of now, in 2018. The ratio is anticipated to reach 40% by 2020. It is anticipated that by 2022, it will reach 50%, and by 2025, three out of

every four Indians will have access to YouTube. India's audience is expected to continue to increase exponentially and quickly in the coming years. The majority of the viewing time (over 90%) is made up of local material. The daily viewership doubled between 2017 and 2018, thanks to cellphones' increased internet accessibility. The following was taken from <https://swarajyamag.com>:

On Jan, 2020, Business World reported that YouTube has got its biggest the audience, i.e is 8.1% of YouTube viewers. Speaking about the company's future intentions, Satya Raghavan, Director of YouTube Partnerships in India, said, "With the breadth and diversity of the creators on YouTube, we will continue to invest in supporting this ecosystem. We're confident that in 2020, the number of regional languages on the site will increase significantly. Informed Raghavan, "From 2015 till last year, we have made tremendous progress in engaging and activating the creator ecosystem focusing on Hindi and four South Indian languages. But it's in 2019, is when saw the language creator's growth truly explode - the depth and diversity of Indian language content on YouTube has been phenomenal." The YouTube India home page is available in ten languages and 60 per cent of YouTube watch-time is from outside the six largest cities in India.

In recent past, YouTubers in various regional languages are generating video content of various categories. Bengali YouTubers are not lagging behind anyway and the surprisingly many YouTubers hail from rural Bengal. There are plenty of channels with a wide range of videos starting have been started in Bengali language.

YouTubers from Rural Bengal

This whooping increase in the number of YouTubers from rural Bengal has urged the need of research to study the patterns of YouTubing of rural Bengal. Can we have Carry Minati from Bengal too? Ajey Nagar aka Carry Minati hails from Faridabad and is a popular Indian YouTuber with over 9.1 million followership covering entertainment and gaming genres of content.

Table 1: The popular categories of Channels owned by Rural Bengali YouTubers are

Sl. No.	Categories	Name of the Channel	Name of the Owner	Subscribers as on 30.04.2021	Joined On
1	Food & Cooking	Popi Kitchen with Village Cooking	Mr. Surajit Chauliya	1.87M	15.08.2018
		Vill Food	Not provided	1.51M	15.07.2017
2	Bengali Tech Tips	All Bangla Tips	Babon Das	1.47 M	15.02.2017
3	Personal Bangla Vlogs (Village Life)	Sulekha Mitra	Not provided	105k	12.01.2018
4		My Village Life Tina	Not provided	90.4k	31.01.2021
5	Devotional music- (Bengali Kirtan)	MK Studio India	Prasenjit Das	310k	14.02.2019
		Popular Kirtan	Prasenjit Das	Hidden	16.01.2021
6	Bengali Music & dance, Folk/Traditional song	Folk India	Ajoy Das	273k	26.01.2019
		Sadher Ektara	Bikram Das	131K	18.05.2018
		Purulia Music	Amit Gorai & his partner	104k	19.06.2019

Literature review

Study of YouTube can attract other researchers and will give more results besides affecting our educational system (Alias, 2013) ^[1].

There are now billions of users on YouTube, including students and teachers. Even though there is considerable indication in the academic literature that YouTube has been researched and written about, nothing is known about the

top priorities for YouTube study. To gather information on research themes, issue categories, research settings, sampling, research design, research method, and data analysis on articles published about YouTube in selected journals, this study used trend analysis and content analysis techniques (Cheung & Hew, 2009) ^[3].

Adivasi groups and organizations are increasingly operating their own Facebook, Twitter, websites, and YouTube

channels; these platforms are used to disseminate information about Adivasi lives and current issues. For instance, Facebook pages like Santhal Community and We the Banjara are more community-specific, while Adivasi-Tribal India and Dalit Adivasi Dunia discuss general Adivasi issues in India. These social media platforms not only share information about events, cultures, education, and jobs, but they also support online activism and legitimize problems with fundamental human rights. Adivasinetwork.com and Adivasi.net are just a couple of the specialized Adivasi websites and blogs that gather and report on regional socio-political issues, cases of oppression, and injustice. Additionally, Adivasi people contribute movies about their culture and art on websites like YouTube, Adivasi-Topic, and Jharkhandi.Org. Additionally, pro-Adivasi groups like Naramada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and Ekta Parishad have posted movies about activism in various online platforms (Dutta, 2016)^[15].

Having started in 2005, YouTube has developed into a prominent online video-sharing destination. The millions of video clips on YouTube represent a broad spectrum of user interests including those of educators, scholars and researchers. YouTube EDU (<http://www.youtube.com/edu>) illustrates a portion of the growing academic presence on YouTube as colleges and universities establish institutional channels through which they share videotaped lectures and campus events. YouTube has become a topic of discussion and inquiry within the scholarly literature as educators and researchers grapple with questions about the possibilities and problems associated with social media (Chenail, 2008; Snelson *et al.*, 2012)^[2, 8].

More innovators can now get beyond the barriers erected by the media industry and transition from obscurity to popularity and prosperity. For instance, it is usual to read and hear about musical talents, like Canadian pop star Justin Bieber, who use YouTube to break into the mainstream media industries. To equate such mobility with democratization would be a mistake. Scooter Braun, Bieber's manager, came across him while looking for another artist on YouTube. At the time, Bieber only had a few thousand views on each of his six or eight videos (Herrera, 2010)^[5].

Once Justin and his mother relocated to Atlanta to be with him, the ambitious Braun, who had expertise at a pretty high level in music industry marketing, quickly signed Bieber to a major record label, Island-DefJam (a division of Universal, the biggest record company in the world). In reality, informal and semi-professional economies, from which innovators and artists have historically originated, are now replicated online via YouTube (and less well-known websites like SoundCloud). It is true that social media and user-generated content (UGC) platforms like YouTube have paved the way for new types of celebrities like beauty vloggers and gaming commentators, who build their reputations on the basis of developing an authenticity and the capacity to develop a close bond of trust with their audience members. However, in order to expand beyond a relatively limited community, such celebrities are integrated into organizations that pursue PR, promotion, and branding, and when followers learn about this, it may jeopardize the carefully cultivated feeling of authenticity (Jerslev, 2016)^[7]. Therefore, democratization is frequently used in the context of the media and media industries to simply refer to an increase in access, whether it be to producing or consuming

media products. However, the phrase can also be used in a more radical sense to describe a shift that might enhance or reform the media by fostering greater levels of equality in group decision-making over the media's operations. This is important because, at least according to democratization advocates, undemocratic media processes can result in issues with media products, such as inadequate representation, voice, and visibility for weaker, marginalized groups. This can have a negative impact on participation, equality, justice, and democracy in a variety of other areas of society. However, the issue of how democratic media production is (as opposed to how democratic or progressive media content is) has received little attention in recent years (David, 2015).

Objective /Aim of the Research

- To draw a conclusion about the YouTubing as livelihood of rural youths
- To study the future of YouTubers in rural Bengal
- To know the taste of audience preferring channels of rural Bengal YouTubers
- To study the strategies made by the YouTubers for enhancing earnings
- To study whether Digital India Campaign has reduced the 'Digital Divide' in rural areas of Bengal

Methodology

The research methodology is of qualitative approach. Telephonic interview of popular YouTubers helped in gathering the Primary data. Secondary data consists of a rigorous search in YouTube for Popular Bengali channels & online Literature survey was done to retrieve information from newspaper articles.

Findings

There are thousands of channels in the above categories, but all do not have a good viewership and rural background demographically. After a thorough YouTube search the channels (Table 1) were selected with higher viewership and they work sitting at their home in villages.

1. The best cooking channel from rural Bengal is Popi Kitchen with Village Cooking started on 15 Aug, 2018 has now 1.87M subscribers surpassing its nearest competitor Villfood (1.51M subscribers) which started its journey on YouTube on 15 July, 2017. Mr. Surajit Chaulia, 37, hails from Mayachor village in Purba Medinapur District started this channel after his marriage with Popi Cahulia, 28. She is fond of cooking and has a habit of noting down the recipes from TV Channels since her adulthood. Mr. Chaulia has obtained his Higher secondary degree and has done ITI training and he works in a thermal plant. However, to keep his wife's passion of cooking alive, he started cooking channel in the year 2018.

Initially, they used their mobile phone for capturing videos and later, they bought a camera for the job. Today, they are successful YouTuber couple winning hearts of netizens around the world through their village cooking methods of rural Bengal.

Mr. Chaulia agrees that he earns a handsome income but didn't disclose the figure. Earlier, all jobs from capturing video to uploading on YouTube was done by him, but he know he has employed two nos. of cameramans, 2 helpers to assist her wife in cooking and

- one person for editing of the videos. In recent times, they have started one more channel The Real Village Cooking to showcase the tribal cooking tradition.
2. The Tech YouTuber Babon Das hails from Samudragarh village of Purba Burdwan District of Bengal who made it to 1.47M subscribers. He had very bad academic scores in his Secondary and Higher Secondary class. He belongs to a very poor family and after failing in second year of his graduation, he decided to assist his father in weaving work as Taant sarees from Samudragarh are quite popular. He also worked as plumber and performed any other job to make some money to help his family. One day, while searching YouTube he got to know about making money from 'YouTube'. Getting a tip off from that video, he was determined to launch his channel and started with channel Funker Gang, with his friend to upload comedy and prank videos but was not satisfy with the success. Later, he decided to start his own channel - ALL Bangla Tips. Today he is teaching tech guide to all Bengalis through his channel.
 3. Popular female face in YouTube from rural Bengal is of My Village Life Tina and Sulekha Mitra where the daily life of a Saas-Bahu from Badkulla Village in Nadia district is shown. Both the channels are doing fairly well with subscribers of 90.4k and 105k respectively.
 4. Mr. Prasenjit Das, resident of Kopai village of Birbhum district of Bengal owns channel namely: MK Studio India (292k subscribers) launched in 2019 where devotional songs, especially kirtans are being uploaded. Seeing the success of this channel, another channel Popular Kirtan was launched in 16.01.2021. He also agrees that he runs more channels but did not disclose the names of the channel. There are many other kirtans channels which are doing fairly well but subscribers figure is hidden. So, those were not considered for the research.
 5. Mr. Ajoy Das, 35, hails from Sonapur village of Uttar Dinajpur District. After obtaining his Secondary school degree he was jobless. Being a singer, he got to know about Youtubing from other artists during his performances. Later, he launched his channel Folk India (273k subscribers) on 26.01.2019. He uploads dance & music videos of Bengali Folk Culture (Kirtan, Baul songs, Vatiyali, Jatra songs etc.). He agrees that electric supply and internet connections create hindrance sometime, but he has alternative sources like Mobile internet, WI-Fi device, Bluetooth sharing and inverter. In order to enhance visibility of the channel, he uploads performances of popular artists of Bengali Folk Culture. He makes a good money and also hires freelancers (cameraman/editors) for preparing the content of his channel.
 6. While studying, it was found that beauty vlogs, education, comedy related channels are rarely owned by rural YouTubers. Most of these channels are owned by YouTubers hailing from urban location as certain props and good presentation skills are required, which the YouTubers from rural places cannot offer.
 7. Also, there are few content creators who work with YouTubers who are well-versed with YouTubing methods. Mr. Amrit Kumar Gorai, who is a professional lyrics composer is a resident of Jalda

village in Purulia, remains busy in creating content for the channel Purulia Music (104k subscriber launched on 19.06.2019). He works with his partner who hails from Hazaribag (a town in Jharkhand state) to upload his works on YouTube Channel.

Limitations of the research

During online search for YouTube channels owned by youth of rural Bengal, it was noticed that there are many channels (with good viewership and subscribers) have not mentioned their location/or contact details. Due to time constraints efforts were not made to look for the details further. Here, remains a scope of further study in this field.

Conclusions

The rate at which the YouTubers are growing from rural Bengal, it is surely going to bring a boom in new media Industry in coming years. Content creators are focusing on food channels, Tech Tips, Village life vlogs, music & dance videos, from rural Bengal as these themes have higher viewership and hence enhances their chances of earning good source of income without being migrating to any other place. If YouTube is not the main source of income, it would be surely a part time engagement to make money for rural youth. While interviewing the rural YouTubers, it was noticed that many are running their channels along with some other job/business in order to compensate with the ups and down with viewership. So, to be in the safer side, many are opting YouTube as a part time source of income. Also, the Digital India Campaign & Telecom Industry has a greater role to play in helping the rural Bengal Youtubers to reach the epitome of success. Continuous power supply and good internet connectivity is making their job easier now.

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