



## Historical Context of Social Media: Reference to India

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### Abstract

This paper is aimed at exploring the Social media has transformed communication and interaction patterns worldwide. In India, its evolution is deeply rooted in the socio-political and technological advancements of the country. This paper explores the historical development of social media with specific reference to India, tracing its journey from traditional forms of communication to the digital age. By examining the interplay between cultural, economic, and technological factors, the paper offers insights into how social media has shaped and been shaped by Indian society.

**Keywords:** Historical Evolution of Communication in India, the Digital revolution in India.

### Introduction

Social media is a product of technological evolution, enabling individuals and communities to interact in unprecedented ways. In India, the story of social media is intertwined with its historical and cultural fabric. From early community networks to the emergence of digital platforms, India's relationship with social media has been dynamic and transformative. This paper examines the historical context of social media in India, analysing its roots and its impact on Indian society over time.

#### A. Historical Evolution of Communication in India

##### Traditional Forms of Communication

Before the advent of digital technology, India depend on indigenous and traditional systems of communication deeply rooted in its cultural and social fabric. These forms were instrumental in fostering community related, disseminating information, and preserving cultural heritage.

##### Oral Storytelling and Community Gatherings

- **Oral Tradition:** Storytelling was a cornerstone of communication in ancient India. It included epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which were transmitted orally for generations. Storytellers, often called *kathavachaks* or *bards*, played a crucial role in educating and entertaining the masses.
- **Community Gatherings:** Village assemblies, or *panchayats*, served as platforms for decision-making and information sharing. These councils were crucial in addressing communal issues and ensuring the dissemination of key messages within rural communities.

- **Temple Announcements:** Temples functioned as hubs of information. Priests and community leaders used temple premises to make public announcements, especially regarding festivals, rituals, and local events.
- These three forms are very important role playing in the communication system.

##### Folk Media as Early Social Networks

- **Puppetry:** String, shadow, and rod puppetry were widely used to communicate moral stories and socio-political messages. Shows like *Kathputli* in Rajasthan served as a medium of storytelling with vivid visuals.
- **Street Theater:** Traditional street performances like *Jatra* in Bengal and *Tamasha* in Maharashtra delivered messages on social issues such as caste discrimination, poverty, and colonial exploitation.
- **Music and Ballads:** Traveling minstrels, *bauls* of Bengal, and similar folk singers disseminated narratives through songs. These were not only forms of entertainment but also methods of preserving history, folklore, and community ethos.

These traditional communication systems can be considered early forms of "social networks" as they relied on interpersonal connections and collective participation, laying the groundwork for future media evolution.

##### The Printing Press and Newspapers

The arrival of the printing press during the colonial period revolutionized communication in India, making it possible to distribute written content on a large scale.

### Introduction of the Printing Press

The printing press was introduced to India by Portuguese missionaries in Goa in the mid-16th century. Initially used for religious texts, it gradually expanded to include literary and political works. This innovation enabled a shift from oral to written communication, increasing accessibility to knowledge and information.

### Rise of Newspapers

Bengal Gazette (1780): India's first newspaper, launched by James Augustus Hicky, provided a platform for intellectual discourse. Though it was short-lived, it sparked the emergence of other newspapers. Regional Newspapers: By the 19th century, newspapers like *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, *Kesari* (edited by Bal Gangadhar Tilak), and *The Hindu* became powerful tools for promoting Indian independence and raising social awareness. These newspapers acted as networks of readers who shared and debated ideas, creating a sense of community and collective consciousness similar to the digital interactions seen on modern social media platforms.

### Radio and Television

The introduction of electronic mass media transformed communication in India, marking a new phase of technological and cultural integration.

### The Advent of Radio

Early Developments of radio broadcasting began in India in the 1920s with private initiatives. In 1936, All India Radio (AIR) was established, becoming a state-controlled entity. AIR was instrumental in unifying a diverse nation by broadcasting content in multiple languages. It delivered news, music, education, and cultural programs, especially in rural areas. Community Experience of Radio brought people together to listen to important broadcasts, such as speeches by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. This created a collective listening experience, much like the way social media today facilitates shared digital events.

### Television and Doordarshan

Introduction of TV (1959): Television made its debut in India with an experimental station in Delhi. By the 1970s, Doordarshan emerged as the primary national broadcaster. Cultural and Educational Impact of Doordarshan broadcasted popular programs like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which were watched by millions simultaneously, fostering a collective viewing experience. Educational content and rural development programs further emphasized the medium's utility. Satellite Expansion in (1980s) the advent of satellite technology expanded television's reach, bringing live news and entertainment to remote areas.

Comparing with Social Media Both radio and television promoted shared experiences and communal interaction, similar to social media

platforms like YouTube and Twitter today. These mediums were centralized and controlled but set the stage for the decentralized, participatory nature of modern digital communication. Each phase contributed uniquely to India's sociocultural fabric, with modern social media inheriting characteristics such as fostering networks, creating shared experiences, and amplifying voices from these earlier forms. By understanding this evolution, we can appreciate the continuity and change in how Indians connect and share their stories.

### B. The Digital Revolution in India

The digital revolution in India marks a transformative period in the nation's communication and technology landscape. It reflects the integration of the internet, mobile technology, and government initiatives that have significantly reshaped how Indians interact, share information, and access services. Below is a detailed exploration of key phases in the digital transformation from a research perspective.

#### Introduction of the Internet

##### Historical Background: The Arrival of the Internet

The internet marked its official arrival in India on August 15, 1995, through the efforts of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL), a state-owned telecommunications company. This event not only signaled India's entry into the digital age but also laid the foundation for a transformative journey in communication, commerce, education, and governance.

Initial Challenges of internet the early adoption of the internet faced significant hurdles, High Costs: Internet access was expensive, limiting its availability to elite urban users, the absence of widespread digital infrastructure meant that internet services were confined to metropolitan cities, Most Indians lacked awareness and skills to utilize the internet effectively. Despite these barriers, the internet's introduction represented a turning point in India's technological landscape.

##### The Role of VSNL and Early Access

- **Dial-Up Connections:** The first internet connections were provided via slow dial-up modems with speeds of 14.4 Kbps to 56 Kbps, making basic web browsing and email the primary uses.
- **Email as a Game-Changer:** Email became the earliest and most prominent application of the internet, replacing traditional forms of communication like letters and faxes in urban corporate settings.
- **Public Sector Monopoly:** For much of the 1990s, VSNL retained a monopoly over internet services, resulting in limited competition and innovation.

##### The Cybercafé Era: Widening Access

The early 2000s witnessed the rise of cybercafés as big revaluation in provide services to user, which played a crucial role in introducing internet access to a broader audience. Affordable Access Points of Cybercafés offered low-cost internet sessions, allowing students, professionals, and small business owners to experience the internet for the first time. Chat platforms like Yahoo Messenger, email services like Hotmail, and early search engines like AltaVista became popular among users. Cybercafés also became hubs for gaming and social interaction, particularly for India's urban youth. Cybercafés democratized access to the internet, bridging the gap between the elite and the general public.

### **Early Social Media Platforms**

The emergence of social media platforms in India during the early 2000s was a defining phase in the nation's digital transformation. These platforms marked a shift from static, one-way communication on websites and emails to dynamic, interactive, and user-driven online experiences. Early social media networks became spaces for self-expression, connection, and collaboration, introducing Indians to the concept of digital communities.

### **The Arrival of Social Media in India**

Social media first gained prominence in India in the mid-2000s, riding on the back of increasing internet penetration and affordable access through cybercafés. This period coincided with the global rise of platforms such as Orkut, MySpace, and Hi5, which resonated with India's growing base of young, urban internet users. The most important features of Early social media platforms provides to user profiles for showcasing personal information, Photo sharing, status updates, and message boards, Community-building tools like groups and forums.

#### **Orkut:**

Orkut is Launched by Google in 2004, Orkut became the first social media platform to gain widespread adoption in India. By 2008, India had become one of Orkut's largest user bases, second only to Brazil. Orkut provides features to user allowed users to create profiles, add friends, and join communities based on shared interests, The "scrapbook" feature enabled users to exchange messages, fostering personal interaction, Orkut's communities ranged from fan groups to academic discussions, creating diverse spaces for interaction. This media widely cultural impact on society. Orkut became a hub for urban youth, providing a platform to socialize, discuss ideas, and form virtual relationships. It was also one of the first instances where Indians engaged with digital advertising and brand presence online. by the late 2000s, the rise of Facebook led to Orkut's decline. It eventually dissolved in September 2014.

### **Blogging and the Rise of Individual Expression**

Before mainstream social media platforms dominated, blogging became an essential tool for digital expression, Websites like Blogger (by Google), WordPress, and LiveJournal allowed users to publish content easily. To blog on websites has different variety Personal blogs are Individuals shared their life experiences, hobbies, and opinions, Political and social commentary blog are Activists and intellectuals used blogs to discuss issues like corruption, education, and inequality, Creative writing blog are Aspiring writers and poets found blogs a free and accessible medium for showcasing their work. This platforms are widely impact on communication blogging democratized access to publishing, enabling anyone with internet access to voice their opinions. Many early bloggers in India went on to become influential thought leaders in the digital space.

Early social media platforms like Orkut and blogging sites played a crucial role in introducing Indians to the concept of digital interaction and community building. They not only transformed personal communication but also set the stage for the social media explosion of the smartphone era. While their reach was initially limited by infrastructure and linguistic barriers, their cultural and social impact was undeniable, marking the beginning of India's journey as a digitally connected society.

### **The Smartphone Era and Social Media Explosion**

In the Indian market the availability of low-cost smartphones in the early 2010s revolutionized internet access in India. Companies like Micromax and international brands like Samsung and Xiaomi provided affordable devices to the masses. The introduction of 3G (2011) and 4G networks (2016) enhanced mobile internet speeds, enabling seamless browsing and multimedia sharing. Smartphone allow to user use various Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram became household names, offering users diverse ways to share content, engage with communities, and consume information. Facebook became a hub for social interaction, marketing, and entertainment, Twitter gained traction for real-time updates, political discourse, and celebrity engagement, Instagram's visual appeal made it a favourite for influencers and brands targeting younger demographics.

#### **WhatsApp:**

Introduced in 2010, WhatsApp quickly became India's most popular instant messaging platform. Its simplicity, multilingual support, and low data consumption made it especially popular in rural areas where literacy levels were lower, and traditional text-based platforms were less effective. By 2021, India had over 400 million WhatsApp users, making it a central tool for communication, education, and even business transactions.

Summary of various important developments in the evolution of social media. Table 1:

S.No	Year	Important Inventions/ Developments	Description	Name of Inventor(s)/ Founder(s)
1	1792	Telegraph	A device of sending messages by visual signals, with the help of towers and pivoting shutters, messages were delivered much quickly than a horse over a long distance.	Joseph Henry
2	1836	Morse code	A way used in telecommunication for sending text as a series in two different signal durations with clicks, on-off tones, or lights that can be easily interpreted.	Samuel F. B. Morse
		Pneumatic mail	A device to send letters with pressurized air tubes.	William Murdoch
4	1876	Telephone	A communication device that allow two users to talk to each other when they are too far.	Alexander Graham Bell
5	1895	Radio	A device transmitting signals by electromagnetic waves.	Guglielmo Marconi
6	1969	CompuServe	The first commercial online service in United States, the earliest form of internet was developed.	Jeffrey M. Wilkins
7	1971	The first email	A text message sends as part of a program for ARPANET.	Ray Tomlinson
8	1978	Bulletin Board system (BBS)	Computer terminals that permit users to share or exchange messages on a network.	Ward Christensen and Randy Suess.
9	1979	Usenet	Newsgroups that allowed the users to exchange user-generated content.	Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis
10	1986	LISTSERV	First email list management program.	Eric Thomas
11	1988	Internet Relay Chat	A chatting system based on client/server software and based on certain rules and conventions.	Jarkko Oikarinen
12	1989	World wide web	A space created for information where Uniform Resource Locators find web resources like documents etc. interlinked by hypertext links, and can be accessed through the Internet.	Tim Berners-Lee
13	1994 (First blog was created)	link.net	A website in which posts are published on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order.	Justin Hall
14	1995	Classmates	A social networking service designed to help users to find their classmates.	Randy Conrads
16	1999	Cyworld	A South Koreansocial network service to build social relations among people.	Dong-Hyung Lee
		Mixi	An online Japanese social networking service.	Kenji Kasahara
		QQ	An instant messaging software service provide microblogging, voice chat software, music, movies, online social games, shopping.	Shenzhen Tencent
		Blogger	A blog-publishing service that permits multi-user blogs with time-sequenced entries.	Pyra Labs
		LiveJournal	A social networking service where users can keep a blog, diary or journal.	Brad Fitzpatrick
17	2000	Lunar Storm	A social networking website for teenagers from Sweden which is commercially advertisement-financed.	Rickard Eriksson
18	2001	Ryze	A social networking website designed to build connections between business professionals, specifically upcoming entrepreneurs.	Adrian Scott
19	2002	Friendster	A website that permit users to contact other members, share videos, photos, messages via networks.	Jonathan Abrams
		LinkedIn	First network devoted to business is employment and business oriented professional networking service that helps employers to post jobs and job seekers to post their CVs in response via internet or mobile apps.	Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Konstantin Jean-Luc

				VaillantGuericke , EricLy,
		Photobucket	Foremost important photosharing site which is a media storage site that permits people to upload photos and video to member's personal account and share it with others.	Alex Welch, Darren Crystal
20	2003 (Social networking andBookmarking sites appear)	Tribe.net	A social networking site for tribe (group) of friends.	Paul Martino, Mark Pincus, and Valerie Syme.
		Delicious	A social bookmarkingweb service that store, share, and discover webbookmarks.	Joshua Schachter and Peter Gadjokov
		Myspace	A social networking website designed for collaborating network of friends, blogs, personal profiles, groups, music, photos and videos submitted by users.	Chris DeWolfe, Tom Anderson, Jon Hart
21	2004	Facebook	A social networkingwebsite that permits to send messages, create profiles, upload photos and videos by users who are registered on it and also promotes and facilitates interaction between friends, family and colleagues.	Mark Zuckerberg
		Orkut	A social networking site that enables its users to meet their friends both old and new ones and help users to maintain existing relationships.	Orkut Buyukkotken
		Hyves	A Dutch social networking site for meeting with friends.	Raymond Spanjar and Floris Rost Van Tonningen
		Hi5	A San Francisco based social networking site.	RamuYalamanch ani
22	2005	Bebo	A social networking website for fun activities.	Michel and XochiBirch
		YouTube	A video sharing platform that permits users to upload their videos and watch videos which are posted by other users.	Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim
23	2006	Twitter	A Social networking and online news service on which people post and interact with "tweets".	Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, BizStone, Evan Williams
		Spotify	A music and podcast streaming platform pays royalties on the basis of number of artists' streams out of total songs streamed.	Daniel Ek, Martin Lorentzon
		SlideShare	A service that permits users to upload files privately or publicly in the form of PowerPoint, PDF, word etc. The uploaded slide files can be viewed on the site itself or can be linked to the other sites.	Rashmi Sinha
24	2007	Tumblr	A microblogging and social networking website that permits users to post content like multimedia etc. to a short blog. Users can make their blogs private and can also follow blogs of others.	David Karp
		BizSugar	A social networking platform for small businessman, entrepreneurs and managers that permits users to share content like articles, videos, blog posts, podcast and also permit users to view and vote on submissions done by other members.	John Holsen
25	2009	WhatsApp	A cross-platform immediate messaging system that uses Internet to share texts, images, documents, audio and video messages among users who have installed the app on their devices like mobiles, PCs and tablets	Brian Acton and Jan Koum
26	2010	Pinterest	A social network that permits users to visually share, getting information about their interests by posting images or videos to their own or others' boards and surfing what other users have pinned.	Ben Silbermann, Evan Sharp and Paul Sciarra

		Instagram	A photo and video-sharing social networking service.	Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger
		Viber	A Voice over IP (VoIP) and immediate messaging app that permits sending and receiving of images, audio and video through mobile devices between users.	Talmon Marco and Igor Magazinnik
27	2014	Periscope	A live video streaming mobile app that permits sharing and experiencing live video streams direct from tablet or smartphone.	Joe Bernstein and KayvonBeykpour
28	2015	Minds	A federated social networking service having open source and it integrate the blockchain to provide the community with ERC-20 tokens as rewards for several contributions to the network. Tokens can be used by users for several purposes like endorsing their content or to crowdfund and tip other users for exchange of exclusive content and services by subscribing to them monthly.	Bill Ottman, John Ottman, Mark Harding
29	2016	Gab.ai	A social media website that permits its users to read and write English-language multimedia messages of up to 3,000 characters, called "gabs".	Andrew Torba
		Mastodon	An online self-hosted social media and social networking service that permits anyone to host their own server node in the network, and its various separately operated user bases are federated across many different sites (called "instances").	Eugen Rochko

(Source: author collected from the internet.)

### Government Initiatives and Policies

**Digital India Initiative (2015)** The Indian government launched the Digital India program to make the internet accessible to all citizens and integrate digital services into daily life. Focus areas included e-governance, digital infrastructure, and universal internet access. Programs like PMGDISHA (Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, Feb. 2017) aimed to improve digital literacy in rural areas.

**Reliance Jio and Data Democratization** The entry of Reliance Jio in 2016 was a watershed moment in India's digital revolution. Jio's ultra-affordable data plans and free voice calls led to a massive surge in internet adoption, particularly in semi-urban and rural regions. Mobile data usage in India increased exponentially, and Jio played a crucial role in making social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube accessible to millions.

**Social Media and Public Services-** Government agencies began leveraging platforms like Twitter and Facebook for direct communication with citizens. Government take initiatives like MyGov encouraged participatory governance by enabling citizens to share feedback and ideas. During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played a crucial role in disseminating information, countering misinformation, and coordinating relief efforts.

### Conclusion:

The historical context of social media in India reflects a journey of adaptation and transformation. From traditional networks to digital platforms, communication in India has continuously

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evolved, shaped by cultural, economic, and technological factors. The digital revolution in India, driven by the internet, smartphones, and government initiatives, has transformed the nation into one of the world's largest digital markets. From the slow adoption of the internet in 1995 to the widespread use of social media in rural areas today, India's journey reflects the interplay between technology, affordability, and policy. This revolution has not only connected millions but has also empowered individuals, reshaped businesses, and redefined governance, setting the stage for continued innovation and growth in the digital era. As India moves forward, its unique blend of tradition and modernity will continue to shape the future of social media.

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