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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Internet Usage Pattern, Access and Utilization of Dalit Websites and Blogs by Dalits in India

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### Manuscript Info

#### Manuscript History:

Received: 15 August 2015  
Final Accepted: 15 September 2015  
Published Online: October 2015

#### Key words:

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### Abstract

In India, most of the communication media has been elite oriented and upper class monopolized. With the revolution of new media like internet, the scenario has drastically improvised. Dalits began to access and utilize this medium as a communication platform to write and share in the public sphere. Websites and blogs were exclusively created by Dalit intellectuals to discuss and share Dalit issues. This article explores to answer the questions such as the internet usage pattern of Dalits and their reasons for accessing Dalit websites and blogs. Findings of the research reveal that Dalits spent considerable amount of time in internet and also in Dalit websites and blogs.

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## INTRODUCTION

Internet was once deemed as the costly commodity and which was acquired by only a few has become accessible to all the households irrespective of economic diversities. In the initial period, internet was on par with the mainstream media in terms of its inaccessibility and utilization by the marginal communities particularly Dalit communities in India. Now, the scenario has drastically changed with internet becoming an easily available resource and it is no longer at the reach of only a few elite. Everyone who has the knowledge of internet is able to reap the fruit of this new technology. Notwithstanding to the fact that mainstream is still holds the same attitude towards the marginal communities, internet has become an emerging platform to write and express one's view and ideas to the public.

### Literature Review

Discrimination and rejection encountered by Dalits in India by the mainstream media are also encountered by many marginalised minorities across the globe. Explaining the onus of media towards the underprivileged and marginalised people in the society Cottle (2000) says, "The media occupies a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power". Studies have proven that the key role of the mainstream media in protecting the marginalised communities is long forgotten by the conglomerate media industry. Marginalized minorities are looking up for the media but the media is looking away from them. Minorities are suffering in the media and how these sufferings are chaired by the media is a valid question to be asked. The mainstream media, though differentiated by medium, outlet, genre and subject interests, all too often produce shocking examples of xenophobic reporting (Ramberg , 2006) and racist portrayal, while often publicly committing to the ideals and practices of an inclusive multi-ethnic, multicultural society. In the case of the society like Europe and North-America, the mainstream media has utterly failed in showing the positive images of the marginalised. Various studies have shown that distorted images of minorities are prevalent in news media. Researches on the western [society](#) find that many minority groups whose ideals, values and issues are largely ignored and at times feared or ridiculed by the greater public (ibid).

Van Dijk (1989) in his studies on minorities and media has repeatedly talked about the attitude of the mainstream media towards minorities. He says that researches have time and again shown that the conservative and popular press especially indulges in sometimes blatant "foreigner bashing" and the reproduction and affirmation of racist prejudices. Popular resentment against refugees and other immigrants and minorities is thus both legitimated and at the same time exacerbated. In many countries marginalised problems are ignored or denied and seldom defined as the problem. Everyday discrimination in so many domains of the society is hardly newsworthy. One can hardly find minorities as journalists in the mainstream media. The increasing numbers of competent minority journalists face systematic forms of discrimination in hiring—if they are hired at all—and in promotion. Virtually no European newspaper has minority editors or minorities in prominent positions.

In the United States of America, the minorities include the Blacks, the Latino Americans, the Hispanics, the Native Americans, and the Native Red Indians. They were excluded, seen as threatening and stereotyped by the mainstream media (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1985). Mahtani (2001) in his research paper opines that the under representation and misrepresentation of minority groups in the media affects Canadian society by upholding the stereotypical notions and ways that people perceive these groups. The Italian newspapers constructed the image of Albanians as "others" and excluded from the majority Italian society (Palmer, 2002). Many European and American studies have found continuous bias in the representation of ethnic minorities: negative stereotyping, broad generalizations, lack of background information, almost no attention is paid to the economical benefits of migration, and so on (Van Dijk, 2000). In Europe, in particular, little attention has been paid to audience responses within ethnic minority communities (Ross, 2001).

In this scenario, the emergence of the new technology – internet has paved way for the disenfranchised marginal to use it as an alternative to the mainstream media for writing and responding to the rest of the world. Minorities and marginalised in the world deem it as a boon to express and share their pain and happiness with others. The advent of the internet has provided them the hopes that it would make previously marginalized actors and arguments more visible to a broader public (Gerhard & Schafer, 2009).

Ethnic minorities are hardly heard in the traditional media and they struggle perpetually to be heard. This situation is due the power of the dominant discourse which purposely ignores marginal voices. Now, with the emergence of internet, marginalized groups can become powerful by creating a web page, or posting a message on a discussion board, and the ability "to speak" can be more important than to be "heard" (Mitra, 2004). As we witness rapid proliferation and availability of internet, many marginal groups are creating their presence of in cyberspace. This phenomenon of 'presence' which the internet is producing is providing a unique forum for the dispossessed to find a voice in the public sphere that might have been otherwise denied to them in the 'real world' (Mitra, 2004).

Internet has proved a powerful tool of empowerment for minority nationalities with access to the web since it represents a terra nullius where readily accessible "virtual archives" of alternative histories can be constructed and maintained. Mitra (2001) articulates that Internet serves as a medium where marginalized individuals can exercise discursive power, and resist damaging representations. Socially marginalized groups speak to one another as they speak against authority. He says "On the Internet, the marginalized can call on the dominant and put the dominant in the difficult position of acknowledging the marginalised, or further distance the dispossessed by ignoring the call".

Dewalt (2010) pronounces that since the popularization of the internet in the early 90's African-Americans have had ways to talk back to these negative stereotypes by using various forms of internet – blogs, videos, editorial websites and social media communities to combat negative image and to create new societal norms for African-Americans. There has never before been as much opportunity for conversation and participation found in internet, where the marginal not only speak, but can expect a response as well.

Blogs, an additional feature of internet which saw its arrival in 1990's has become a tool for the marginal to connect and share with others. Marginalized voices – poor, the radical and even everyday people - are given little voice in the Mass media news coverage. Blogs offer a chance those voices and stories to be heard (Roth, 2004). In a research conducted by Pole (2006) on Black's usage of blogosphere, it is found that blogosphere is place where more of political participation by Blacks and other minorities take place.

In another research, Bernardi (2010) attempts to explore the use of blogs by marginalized Saudi women and to see if and how those same issues are comparably articulated by non-governmental organizations, international government organizations, and media outlets. The findings of the research prove that the women blogging community in Saudi Arabia openly discusses women's issues, including issues which challenge religious norms.

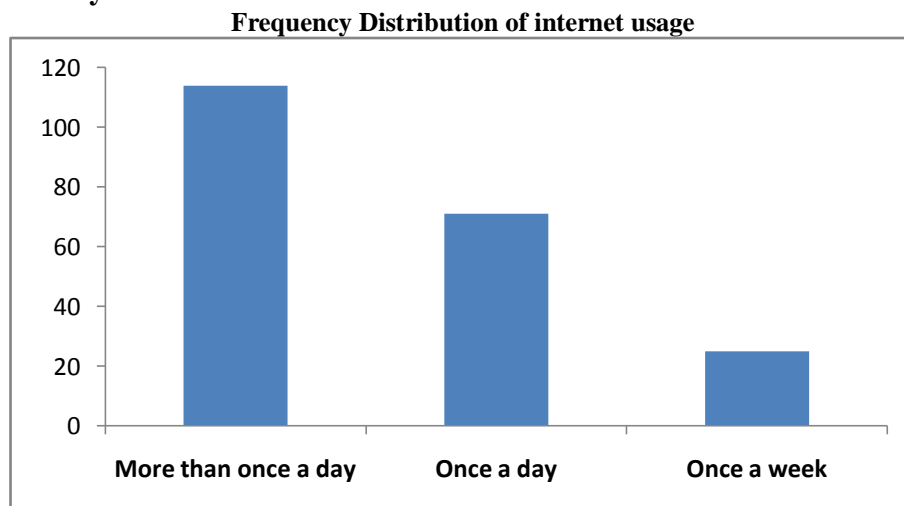
In the case of Dalits' usage of internet in India, Tirumal (2003) in his research paper proposes that educated Dalits' presence is felt in the cyberspace. He says that internet has empowered the educated Dalits with much more than other technology or the media in the recent Indian history. Educated Dalits are beginning to use the internet as a platform to discuss issues concerning their community and to mobilize for their just place in the wider public sphere. There have been a number of efforts by Dalits needing to be articulated in the media for a long time – a media

different from the current format. Speaking to the Dalit Camera, a Dalit websites which brings out videos of Dalit issues, about the advantage that the internet has thrown to the marginalised population like Dalits, activist and one of the members the Dalit website roundtableindia.co.in Nalgundwar (2013) and the moderator of kufr.blogspot.in says that the freedom given by to Dalits by the internet is unaffected by the Indian civil society and the mainstream media. Internet has helped thousands of voices to come together. Dalit websites like roundtableindia.co.in is the place of different articulation of Dalit related poetry, documentary, research, history and literary and creative Dalits. Further he adds, “readership in the Dalit websites and blogs are young and very educated coming from diverse background across region, continent and country” (ibid). Internet provides a platform outside the status quo of disenfranchisement allow some kind of negotiation with the global community. Furthermore, internet has opened the door for counter-hegemonic public sphere (Tirumal, 2003). With the exponential growth and the increasing availability of internet, many marginalised people in the globe are producing their presence in the cyberspace. As mainstream media has closed its door for their ‘presence’, internet offers a plethora of space for the marginalised to rearticulate their social perception. Social media platforms of internet such as Facebook, Blogger, Twitter, WordPress, LinkedIn, Tumblr, MySpace and Wiki provide a place to air marginalised views in a media field previously dominated by media giants, corporations and moguls, favouring the powerful voices in society.

## Methodology

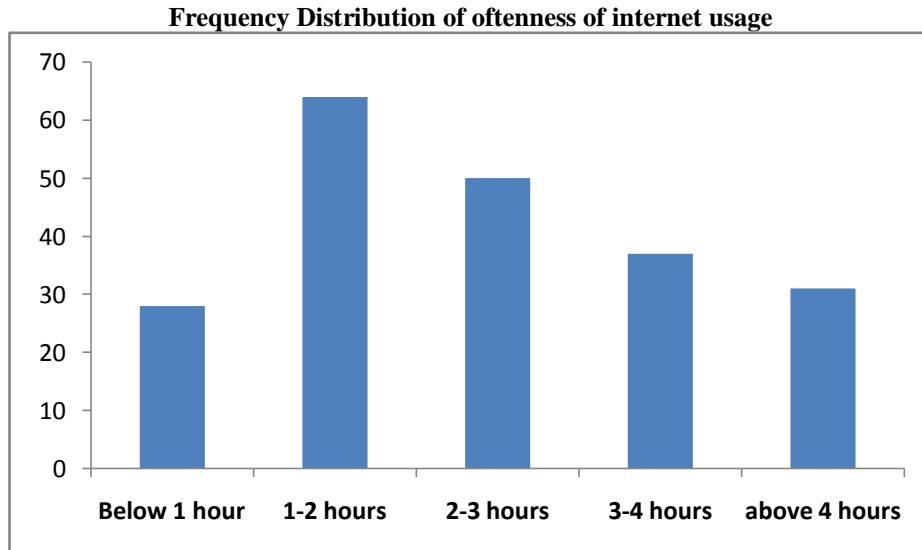
The ultimate objective of the descriptive study is to find out how Dalit web portal and blogs form as an alternative media to articulate the voices of Dalit community. An online survey questionnaire was developed with the help of Google Docs, free Google software for creating online survey. Since the respondents were unknown, the task was first to identify the respondents found online. So, a search was conducted with the help of Google search engine to identify Dalits’ blogs, websites and forums through which the respondents could be reached. The pilot study was of great help in identifying the respondents. The key words used for the search were “Dalits, Scheduled Caste, Adi Dravida, Oppressed people, lower castes, untouchables, Ambedkar, caste system, Parayar and Varna”. A search was again made in the social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter using the same key words aforementioned. The URL link along with an introduction of the researcher and the research was posted in all the Dalit related blogs, websites, forums, face book and twitter. Besides, the URL link to the questionnaire was provided to the participants via email. The list of emails was obtained from the websites of Dalit centers and Ambedkar studies center in and around India. The online survey was circulated and kept open for the respondents to answer the survey for the period of four months. Respondents of the structured questionnaire were identified based on their presence and involvement in internet in talking and responding Dalit related issues. They were selected from Blogs, Dalit internet forums and groups and social networking sites like Facebook. Purposive sampling was adopted to choose the respondents for the study as the researcher’s motivation was only to select the respondents who converse Dalit related issues in the internet.

## Results of the study



**Figure.1**  
Frequency Distribution of internet usage

The above diagram articulates the use of internet per day by the respondents. From the diagram, it is inferred that 54% of the respondents use internet more than once a day and 34% of the respondents use internet once a day. Only 12% of the respondents use internet once a week. So, it can be concluded from the table that majority of the respondents use internet every day. It is very clear from the analysis that the respondents who access internet more than once a day is very higher than the rest of the frequency of usage of internet.



**Figure. 2**  
Frequency Distribution of oftenness of internet usage

The diagram 2 exemplifies the number of hours the respondents spend in internet per day. It can be deduced that 31% and 24% of the respondents use internet for 1-2 hours and 2-3 hours respectively. It is also found that 18% of the respondents use internet for 3-4 hours and 13% of the respondents use it below 1 hour. Only 15% of them spend more than 4 hours per day. Thus, it can be inferred from the analysis that the respondents who use internet for 1-2 hours are quite higher than the respondents who use 2-3 hours.

**Frequency Distribution of online activity**

Online activity	Yes		No		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	
Chat rooms	25	11.90	185	88.10	210
Blogs	88	41.90	122	58.10	210
Music	38	18.10	172	81.90	210
News	133	63.33	77	36.67	210
Instant manager	23	10.95	187	89.05	210
Gaming	16	7.62	194	92.38	210
File sharing	69	32.86	141	67.14	210
Shopping	21	10.00	189	90.00	210
Social Networking	127	60.48	83	39.52	210
Internet TV	22	10.48	188	89.52	210

Browsing	30	85.71	180	14.29	210
E-mail	151	71.90	59	28.10	210
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>97.14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>210</b>

**Table 1**  
Frequency Distribution of online activity

The table 1 illustrates the frequency distribution of online activity by the respondents. It can be construed that among the above mentioned online activities, 86% of the respondents use internet for browsing, 72% use internet for checking mail followed by 63% watching and reading news. It is also observed that 60% of the respondents use internet for accessing social networking sites. It is intriguing to notice that 42% of the respondents use internet for blogging and 33% of them for file sharing. Chat rooms, music, instant messenger, gaming, online shopping and internet TV occupy the least percentage.

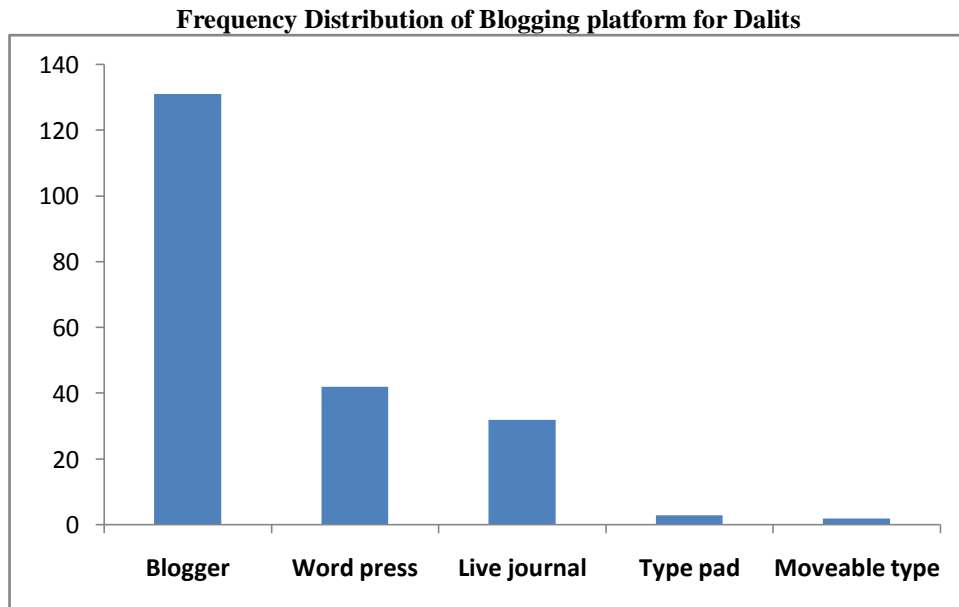
**Frequency Distribution of duration of online activity**

Online activity	More than once a day	Once a day	Once a week	Once a month	Above a month	Total
Blogging	43 (20.48)	70 (33.33)	42 (20.00)	11 (5.24)	44 (20.95)	210
Social networking	32 (15.24)	130 (61.90)	33 (15.71)	9 (4.29)	6 (2.86)	210
Gaming	4 (1.90)	13 (6.19)	22 (10.48)	90 (42.86)	81 (38.57)	210
Web browsing	33 (15.71)	164 (78.10)	11 (5.24)	000 (000)	2 (.95)	210
Music	59 (28.10)	60 (28.57)	64 (30.48)	15 (7.14)	12 (5.71)	210
File Sharing	81 (38.57)	77 (36.67)	42 (20.00)	000 (000)	10 (4.76)	210
Chat rooms	46 (21.90)	18 (8.57)	74 (35.24)	45 (21.43)	27 (12.86)	210
News	45 (21.43)	160 (76.19)	5 (2.38)	000 (000)	000 (000)	210
Shopping	20 (9.52)	17 (8.10)	95 (45.24)	46 (21.90)	32 (15.24)	210
Internet TV	39 (18.57)	32 (15.24)	52 (24.76)	44 (20.95)	43 (20.48)	210

**Note: The value within brackets refers to the row percentage**

**Table 2**  
Frequency Distribution of duration of online activity

The above table 2 indicates the frequency of the internet usage by the respondents on Dalit issues. Findings of the study as indicated in the table, 78%, 76%, and 62% of the respondents are keen in watching and reading news, actively participating in social networking sites and interested in web browsing respectively once a day. With regard to blogging, 33% of the respondents engage once a day and 20% of them more than once a day. In file sharing, 37% of the respondents once a day and 39% of them more than once a day. 28% of them listen to music either once a day or more than once a day. Participation in games and in online shopping is done only by very low percent of respondents.



**Figure. 3**  
Frequency Distribution of Blogging platform for Dalits

The figure.3 illustrates the respondents' preferred platform for blogging. It can be inferred from the above diagram that 62% of the respondents prefer to blog in Blogger platform. The Word press and Live journal blogging platforms are preferred by 20% and 15% of the respondents respectively. It can also be noticed from the table that Type pad and Moveable type blogging platforms are rarely opted as it is only 1 % for each. As seen from the table, it very clear that blogger platform is preferred by majority of the respondents as the features of the platform is user-friendly and easy to use. The platforms such as Type pad and Moveable type secure the least percentage as the respondents hardly 2 to 3.

#### Frequency Distribution of reasons for accessing Dalit websites and blogs

Reasons for accessing Dalit websites and Blogs	Yes		No		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	
I am also a Dalit	151	71.90	59	28.10	210
Interested in Dalit issues	149	70.95	61	29.05	210
Want to issues being discussed	113	53.81	97	46.19	210
Share experience	83	39.52	127	60.48	210
Post articles	51	24.29	159	75.71	210
Educate	72	34.29	138	65.71	210
Get associated	90	42.86	120	57.14	210
Express oneself	72	34.29	138	65.71	210
Get updated	93	44.29	117	55.71	210
Make new friends	58	27.62	152	72.38	210

Seek advice/	55	26.19	155	73.81	210
Give advice	50	23.81	160	76.19	210
To know others think	93	44.29	117	55.71	210
Post pictures/Videos	30	14.29	180	85.71	210
<b>Others</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>95.71</b>	<b>210</b>

**Table 3**  
Frequency Distribution of reasons for accessing Dalit websites and blogs

The table 3 elucidates the reasons behind accessing Dalit websites and blogs by the respondents. 72% of the respondents cite their community identity i.e. Dalit as the reason for accessing Dalit websites and blogs. 71% of the respondents cite their personal interest in Dalit issues as the reason for accessing Dalit websites and blogs. 54% of the respondents access Dalit websites and blogs to know the issues being discussed. From the table it is also understood that 44% of the respondents participate in Dalit websites and Blogs for getting updated on Dalit issues and to know what others think, 43% of the respondents for getting associated with Dalit activists and 40% of the respondents for sharing their experience. The reasons like posting articles/videos/pictures, education, expressing one self, making new friends, seeking and giving advice occupy the average of 20% each. So, the table makes it very easy to conclude that only respondents' Dalit identity and their interest in Dalits issues makes to access Dalit websites and Blogs as it secures the highest percentage. Another factor that intrigues them to access Dalit websites and blogs is the interests to know about what issues are discussed in Dalit websites and blogs, followed by the need for sharing their experience with rest of the world.

#### Frequency Distribution of the number of hours spent in Dalit websites and blogs

Number of hours spent in visiting Dalit websites	Frequency	Percentage
Below 7	153	72.9
7-10	36	17.1
Above 10	21	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table.4**  
Frequency Distribution of the number of hours spent in Dalit websites and blogs

The table.4 explicates the hours respondents spent in Dalit websites per week. The result shows that 73% of the respondents spend below 7 hours per week in Dalit websites and the remaining 17% and 10% of them spend the time 7-10 hours and above 10 hours respectively. It becomes crystal clear that the respondents spend below 7 hours per week is significantly very high with its maximum percentage.

## Conclusion

Dalits are one of the economically poor and socially deprived communities in India. Hence, it is obvious that the modern technologies were initially inaccessible to them. Social studies opine that there is an upsurge in the development of Dalits in terms of their education and economic condition. Literatures too, reveal that Dalits are able to utilize internet for their development. The existence of Dalit websites and social networking sites such as blogs exclusively for discussing Dalit issues itself is a proof to the statement that Dalits are accessing modern technology - internet. The findings of the study reveal that Dalits spend considerable amount of time in surfing internet. Despite the fact that English language is one of the major stumbling blocks in utilizing internet to the fullest, the study indicates that substantial number of learned Dalits are turning to internet. Besides utilizing internet for activities such as chatting, shopping, gaming, messaging, etc, the study signifies that Dalits websites and blogs which were created by Dalit activists are frequently accessed by the respondents of the online survey. Among the reasons for accessing Dalits websites and blogs, personal caste identity, the interest in knowing other Dalits' issues and the respondents' willingness to share and discuss their own issues remain the top most reasons for accessing Dalit websites and Blogs.

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