

COMMUNITY SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THEIR IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

Shikha Bajaj

Assistant Professor, Guru Nanak Khalsa College for Women, Ludhiana

Abstract

This article draws attention importance of community social networks playing as useful resources for the rural progress. Present paper throws light on the development, history and existence of social networks in rural societies. Exploration and discussion of various social networks has been carried out. In light of a rising focus on newest need-based extension calls that aim at expediting the adoption of innovative technologies by smallholder farmers in developing countries, greater analysis is needed of the role of rural social networks and their impact on technology adoption. This paper contributes to this topic by outlining various social networks functional in Indian societies, functioning of which have been reviewed and discussed. If used and executed wisely, a coherent system of these networks may establish greatest impact on technology uptake, thereby lending support to and improving the performance of new extension programmes.

Keywords: *Development, Groups, Network, Organization, Social*

1. INTRODUCTION

Improvement in the quality of life of people is the important agenda of development programmes. In social context, the word 'Development' implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation¹³. The basic objective of all rural development endeavors / programmes has been the welfare of the millions. In order to achieve this, planned attempts have been made to eliminate poverty, ignorance and inequality of opportunities. A wide spectrum of programmes has been undertaken so far, to alleviate rural poverty and ensure improved quality of life for the rural population especially those below the poverty line¹⁰.

In the initial phase of planned rural development, the concentration was on sectors of agriculture industry, communication, education and health. The Ministry of Rural Development places importance now on health, education, drinking water, housing and road so that the quality of life in rural areas improves and the fruit of economic reform are shared by all sections of the society⁵.

With time and experience, it is realized that accelerated and meaningful development can be achieved only if people of the grass root are involved, "people's participation" has become the keyword in development programmes. The participation of the people is necessary to provide the people with better prospects for economic development¹⁰.

In India, a country where the number of people living in rural areas, rural development programme is necessary aspect. A lot of areas in our country demand focus and attention and it has been observed that social networks (not only social media) play a crucial role in figuring out the thrust areas, planning, coordinating and conducting developmental tasks at their locations⁹. Johny et al⁷ reported that social connections within a village magnify the impacts of household characteristics such as education and number of adults by a factor of 3.6 times. Comprehensive data on farmer characteristics and social interactions allow for identifying individual networks, thereby improving upon previous research approaches that employed village-level variables as proxies for network effects⁸.

2. OBJECTIVES

In the present investigation, author intends to explore the presence of prevalent groups and frameworks in Indian societies which are particularly working for growth and improvement in lifestyle and livelihood of masses. Their methods of functioning, work design and target groups have been explored and discussed.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Social Networks

A social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organizations) and a set of the dyadic ties between these actors. Although there are large number of social networks existing in the society, but we will deal with the network involved in development of society⁴.

3.2 History of Social Networks

The history of networks in the society goes way back to centuries; however social networks on internet are recent developments.

People always want to communicate with its other for various purposes. The longer are the distances, the harder is to communicate. Though the history, people came up with various ways of communicating: post, pigeons, telegraph, light signals and telephone. Getting responses a few hundred years ago meant waiting for months.

Social networking came into existence one day in 1971, when the first email was sent. After that bulletin board system was created in 1978³. This board used to host the personal computers where users worked via the modem of a host computer. After that, the very first web browser was born using Usenet. Usenet was created where users posted articles, news and funny posts. This concept soon inspired the groups like Yahoo, Google and other groups to appear.

In 1994, the first social networking site was created, named Geocities. He journey was taken ahead by many other new sites which followed geocities and very rapidly, instant messaging was born giving users the freedom to create profiles and chat¹.

In general, there are two types of social networks which are involved or can be used for extension of knowledge and development.

3.3 Community Networks

3.4 Social Networks on Internet

Each network in its way extends its effort for betterment and development in needy societies. The effort of the change agent is to change the knowledge, skill and attitudes of the people so that their personality undergoes change.

3.3 Community Networks and Development

3.3.1 Government networks: There are numerous government attempts which have been made from time to time for development purposes, according to the needs of people. These include programmes like National Extension Scheme, Community development programme and National social assistance programme. These programmes provide the basic organization, official, non-official and a minimum financial provision for development.

3.3.2 Panchayat smiti, Gram Panchyat : These are tiers of administration at rural levels. Gram panchayat has sarpanch and other panches as members. Panchayat smiti is at block level and includes sarpanches of all panchayat, local M.L.A and M.L.C., and one person nominated by district Collector for every panchayat for which no Sarpanch has been elected⁵.

Their aims of development include instilling a spirit of self-help and initiative and harnessing their enthusiasm for raising the standard of living. Also, they have to enlist the whole-hearted support of the people for the implementation of the development programmes.

3.3.3 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): A non-governmental organization (NGO) is an organization that is neither a part of a government nor a conventional for-profit business. Usually it is set up by ordinary citizens for a developmental purpose.

A large number of non-governmental organizations are working in rural and urban areas for extending skills and training to people for employment generation, educating rural women, providing agricultural helps, hygiene and medical services and many more.

3.3.4 Self help groups: A self-help group (SHG) is a village-based financial intermediary committee usually composed of 10–20 local women or men. These groups may be registered or unregistered. Members make small regular savings contributions over a few months until there is enough capital in the group to begin lending. Funds may then be lent back to the members or to others in the village for any purpose.

- An economically poor individual gains strength as part of a group
- financing through SHGs reduces transaction costs for both lenders and borrowers

Members of self help groups may also join hands to start micro enterprise, pool their money and earn group income².

3.3.5 Consultancies: There are various consultancies working for extending help, services and support to rural people in the areas of agriculture, rainwater harvesting, nursery services, organic farming, food processing, home care and practices, women and child care etc. These consultancies can be both governmental and nongovernmental and but the members work with a single motive of upliftment of needy societies and employment generation. Many of these consultancies provide call centre facilities to their target groups in order to extend timely help and information¹⁰.

3.3.6 Mahila mandal: Mahila Mandal is a non-governmental organisation based in many rural and urban localities, which works with self help groups on issues generally related to domestic violence and sexual and human rights. These groups work for rights and safety of women and contribute to awareness programmes about these. Also, mahila mandals organize protests for their disagreement in any matter related to women safety and rights¹¹.

3.3.7 Extension education institutes: These institutes comprise of students and extension workers. These work under a specialized set of objectives and visit rural areas time to time for diffusion of skills, arranging consultancies and training sessions for rural people. These groups work in an organized manner and provide extension services as a part of their curriculums.

3.4 Social Networks on Internet and Development

In last decade, social networks on internet have rapidly emerged and have become a part of our lives. Although these became a part of developed countries long time back, Indian people became familiar with these services in last 10-15 years. In spite of the great popularity of these social networks, these have a disadvantage of being used in urban areas only. There are many parts of the country, where even electricity has not reached, so internet services are a way apart from a large number of populations. Due to this fact, these social networks cannot be used for development and extension services in rural areas.

These social networks include:

3.4.1 Agri portals: Agri portals have been established as an electronic network in collaboration with input agencies. The information on technology package at village levels to the farmers is made possible through these portals. The portal organizes the information on agricultural practices, agricultural news, animal husbandry, machinery and medicinal plants etc.

3.4.2 Social Connections: These networks include websites like facebook and twitter. People mostly use these sites for keeping in touch with friends and keeping themselves updated with activities of friends. Blogs, photo sharing sites, and online social networking sites have allowed peers to share thoughts, messages, information, images, and videos. In context to development, many NGOs and other groups working for some cause also make their accounts on these websites to make people aware of their attempts and also to join and contribute. Many issues have been targeted and efforts to solve them keep moving.

3.4.3 Educational networks: Educational networks are where many students go in order to collaborate with other students on academic projects, to conduct research for school, or to interact with professors and teachers via blogs and classroom forums.

- The Student Room: UK-based student community featuring a moderated message board and useful resources related to school
- The Math Forum: A large educational network designed to connect students with an interest in math, this site provides interaction opportunities for students by age group.

3.4.4 Professional social networks: Professional social networks are designed to provide opportunities for career-related growth. Some of these types of networks provide a general forum for professionals to connect, while others are focused on specific occupations or interests. A few examples of professional social networks are listed below.

- Classroom 2.0: Social network specifically designed to help teachers connect, share and help each other with profession-specific matters.
- Nurse Connect: Online community designed to help individuals in the nursing profession connect and communicate with each other.

3.4.5 Informational networks: Informational communities are made up of people seeking answers to everyday problems. One may discover countless blogs, websites, and forums filled with people who are looking for the same kind of information. A few examples include:

- Super Green Me: Online community where individuals interested in adopting green living practices can interact
- Do-It-Yourself Community: Social media resource to allow do-it-yourself enthusiasts to interact with each other
- **E-Choupals**: It was launched in 2000. It has already become the largest initiative among all internet based interventions in India. These services today reach out to a large number of farmers and rural people for providing help on agricultural problems and issues.

The system constitutes an internet based kiosk in a village, which is manned by a prominent local farmer who is familiar with computers, known as *Choupal Sanchalak*. Unlike other internet based networks, this one proves extremely beneficial for development of rural societies.

3.5 Benefits of Social Networks

- Social networks target a wide audience, making it effective and useful tool.
- The main advantage of social networking site is that it helps in establishing connection with people, friends and relatives. It helps in sharing one's view, share pictures and lots of other things.
- In an organization, employees are allowed to discuss ideas, post news, ask questions and share links.
- It helps in expanding the boundaries of market research, problem findings and allows any change agent to explore with a wider prospective.
- The social networking sites can be accessed from any part of the world, making it easier for people to link and combine their efforts towards bringing change and development in the society.

3.6 Limitations of Social Networks

- In case of social networks on internet, one of the major limitations is students and teenagers get addicted to it. Usually, the main agenda of using the website takes back seat after sometime and the user keeps on browsing for entertainment.
- Relying only on information provided on social networking sites, and not going through the primary data, may prove harmful in long run.
- These open up the possibility for the hackers to commit fraud and launch spam and virus attacks.
- Social networks on internet may potentially result in lost productivity, especially if employees are busy updating profiles, etc.

4. CONCLUSION

The presence of such social groups in society, the initiatives taken by influential persons, fasten the pace of progress by taking the first steps, directing, systemization and implementing any developmental process in society. Over the years, it has been observed that social networks play a major role in various fields of development. Combined efforts and attempts of all the members of social groups in a single direction, with a common aim, contribute largely in achieving the required level of progress and development. United efforts and systems make a great impact in advancement of societies. It can be concluded in the end that networking and group endeavor is extremely beneficial and necessary for extension services, in which community social networks play a significant role. Further efforts and researches should be aimed in increasing the efficiency and improvement of social networks.

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