

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CREATING AWARENESS AMONG TRIBAL AREAS WITH REFERENCE TO THANE REGION**Sujal Anil Mohite¹ and Sartak Chaudhari²**^{1,2}SYBAMMC Student, JVM's Mehta Degree College**ABSTRACT**

This field-based study examines the level of media literacy among tribal communities in Yeoor village, a rural region of Thane district, Maharashtra. Using a mixed-method approach that included Google Form surveys, face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, and field observation, the research explores how tribal residents access, understand, and apply media in their daily lives. The findings reveal widespread smartphone usage, particularly WhatsApp and YouTube, but limited ability to critically evaluate digital information. Traditional communication methods such as community meetings, word-of-mouth, and local radio remain influential, especially among elders. Barriers to effective media use include language constraints, low formal education, unstable internet connectivity, and economic limitations. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive media literacy programs designed in local dialects and recommends collaboration with local institutions, NGOs, and youth volunteers to promote responsible and informed media consumption.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Tribal Communities, Digital Literacy, Local Dialects, Yeoor Village.

1. INTRODUCTION

Media plays a crucial role in shaping awareness, education, and decision-making in modern society. However, access alone does not ensure meaningful use; individuals must possess media literacy—the ability to understand, analyze, and verify information.

In Yeoor village, located on the outskirts of Thane city, tribal groups such as Warli, Katkari, and Malhar Koli continue to follow traditional lifestyles based on agriculture, forest resources, and daily wage labour. Although smartphones and internet services have become increasingly available, the ability to critically assess digital content remains limited. This gap exposes the community to misinformation related to health remedies, employment opportunities, and government schemes.

Understanding the media habits and challenges faced by these communities is essential for developing effective digital inclusion strategies.

2. Objectives**The study aimed to:**

1. Assess the level of media literacy among tribal residents of Yeoor village.
2. Identify commonly used traditional and digital media platforms.
3. Examine challenges faced in accessing and interpreting media content.
4. Understand the influence of media on education, health awareness, and lifestyle.
5. Suggest measures to strengthen digital and media literacy.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY**2.1 Location**

The Yeoor Hills region of Thane, Maharashtra, is home to several indigenous tribal settlements, predominantly inhabited by the Warli community. Situated within the buffer zone of Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Yeoor consists of multiple Adivasi hamlets that have preserved their traditional lifestyle despite gradual exposure to urban influences. The Warli tribe is internationally recognized for its distinctive art form—Warli painting—which reflects their close relationship with nature, agriculture, and community life. Approximately 3,500 residents spread across six to seven hamlets, these communities continue to practice cultural traditions such as Tarpa dance, folk music, ritual storytelling, and mural art. Knowledge transmission largely takes place through oral communication and practical demonstrations, allowing cultural values and collective memory to be passed down across generations.

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2.2 Historical Background and the Literacy Landscape

Historically, literacy levels within the tribal settlements of Yeoor Hills have remained below state and national averages. This gap has primarily resulted from geographical isolation, limited educational infrastructure, economic constraints, and a cultural preference for oral traditions over formal schooling. For decades, the absence of nearby schools and trained educators restricted access to structured learning for tribal children.

In recent years, however, policy initiatives and social development programs have begun addressing these disparities. Government-supported educational schemes, along with community learning centers, have attempted to improve literacy while maintaining cultural sensitivity. These developments indicate an increasing institutional commitment to inclusive education tailored to tribal contexts.

2.3 Media Literacy: Relevance, Challenges, and Opportunities among the Yeoor Tribes

The Yeoor region has gradually experienced socio-cultural transformation due to growing tourism, improved transportation, and the expansion of hospitality services. The increased interaction with urban visitors has introduced new forms of media exposure, particularly through smartphones and internet connectivity.

Media literacy in this context goes beyond basic reading and writing skills. It encompasses the ability to access digital platforms, interpret online information, and critically evaluate media content. Among Yeoor's tribal residents, however, traditional communication modes—such as oral storytelling, community meetings, and symbolic visual art—continue to dominate daily life. While digital access is expanding, limited critical media skills pose challenges related to misinformation, digital exploitation, and unequal access to online resources.

2.4 Previous Studies and Community Initiatives

Several academic studies and grassroots movements have examined issues of land rights, environmental protection, and livelihood security in Yeoor Hills. These initiatives often intersect with literacy campaigns, recognizing education and media awareness as essential tools for community empowerment and legal advocacy. Tribal petitions to judicial bodies have frequently emphasized not only land ownership but also cultural and educational rights.

Non-governmental organizations and government agencies have implemented programs focusing on healthcare, vocational training, and eco-tourism development. These initiatives aim to integrate indigenous knowledge with modern economic opportunities. They also present potential platforms for introducing culturally appropriate digital and media literacy training tailored to community needs.

However, research also warns that unregulated tourism and commercialization can threaten tribal autonomy by accelerating land displacement and cultural dilution if not carefully managed.

2.5 Critical Analyses and Future Directions

The limited reach of formal education in Yeoor Hills highlights an urgent need for comprehensive media literacy programs. Enhancing digital awareness can expand learning opportunities, promote civic participation, and protect communities from online misinformation and exploitation. Government agencies and civil society organizations must strengthen awareness campaigns focusing on responsible media use alongside academic education.

Future initiatives should emphasize:

- The development of learning materials in indigenous languages and visual formats familiar to tribal communities.
- Community-led curriculum design involving tribal artists, storytellers, and cultural practitioners.
- Educational models that balance technological inclusion with the preservation of traditional identity.

Such approaches can foster sustainable development while ensuring that modernization does not compromise the cultural integrity of Yeoor's indigenous populations.

3. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected through:

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- **Google Form surveys** circulated among smartphone users with the help of local youth volunteers.
- **Face-to-face interviews and group discussions** were conducted in local dialects for participants unfamiliar with digital tools.
- **Participant observation** in community spaces such as anganwadis and households.

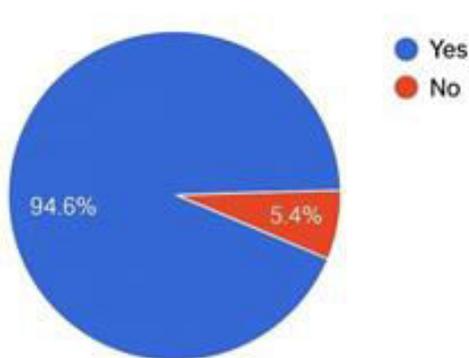
Respondents include

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS:-

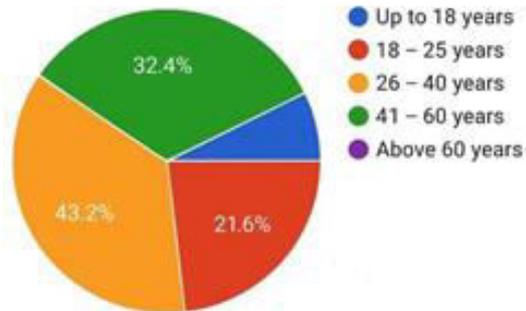
The data clearly shows that the majority of respondents (26–40 years) are in the working age group, followed by the 41–60 years group. This indicates that the responses largely reflect the views of adults actively engaged in livelihood activities, while the participation of elderly and very young people was limited.

Do you use the internet on mobile? 2. Age:

37 responses



37 responses

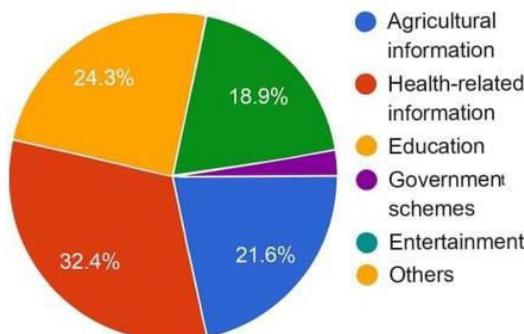


Mobile Internet Usage among Respondents

Out of 37 respondents, a large majority (94.6%) reported using the internet on their mobile phones, while only 5.4% said they do not use it.

Q.16. Which information seems most useful to you through the media?

37 responses



IMPACT OF MEDIA:-

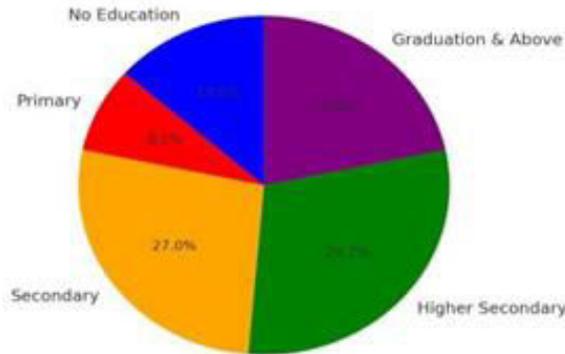
The chart shows that health information is the top priority for the community, followed by education and agriculture, which are crucial for livelihood and development. Awareness of government schemes is also important, but less prioritized compared to immediate needs like health and education.

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4. Education Level: 37 responses



EDUCATION:-

This indicates that the community has a moderate to high literacy level, which positively affects their ability to understand, interpret, and use media effectively. However, the small group with no education may face challenges in accessing or critically analyzing digital information for men, women, youth, and elders to ensure a balanced perspective.

IMAGES:-



‘Sanjay Gandhi location of yeoor hills’- Locality of the tribal community



Interaction of group members with Mrs. Natasha Sonkar (Adivasi Morcha: District President & Social Worker).



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‘Connecting Road to Main Thane City’.



Field Survey Team & Local Resident Group Photo.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The study found that:

- Most households own Android smartphones and actively use WhatsApp and YouTube.
- There is limited awareness of misinformation, resulting in blind trust in forwarded messages and online advertisements.
- Traditional communication channels remain influential, particularly among elders.
- Language barriers, poor internet connectivity, low formal education, and economic limitations hinder digital participation.
- Youth members often assist elders in using digital platforms, acting as informal digital mediators.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research highlights that while digital access is expanding in Yeoor, critical media understanding remains weak. Strengthening media literacy is essential to protect tribal communities from misinformation and to empower them to make informed choices regarding health, education, and governance.

Key Recommendations:

- Develop media literacy programs in local dialects.
- Use familiar platforms such as WhatsApp and community radio for awareness campaigns.
- Train local teachers and youth volunteers as digital literacy facilitators.
- Encourage partnerships between NGOs, gram panchayats, and educational institutions.

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