

Swipe, Scroll, and Mislead: Insights from the Youths on Digital Addiction and Misinformation in Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

India's digital expansion has rapidly transformed its citizens' everyday life, with over 886 million internet users nationwide. State like Arunachal Pradesh too has witnessed increasing internet access, altering youth's engagement in technology. While online platforms offer educational and social benefits, some serious risk such as digital addiction and spread of misinformation also comes with digital expansion. In Arunachal Pradesh, where digital literacy remains uneven, the information one obtain through social media is concerning. As social media helps in shaping public opinion, it has become a hub for misinformation, especially in regions with limited media literacy like Arunachal Pradesh. In this study the dual challenge of digital addiction and the spread of misinformation among youth in Arunachal Pradesh have been examined. This research has collected data from both existing literatures and incorporated findings from primary sources with the use of online-questionnaire to explore the behavioural pattern of Arunachal's youth in digital space. By focusing on the state of Arunachal Pradesh, the paper highlights critical thinking as essential competencies for Arunachal's youth in the digital age. The findings recommend digital literacy initiatives to that support healthier and promote more informed digital engagement among the state's youth as well as entire population.

Keywords: Digital Addiction, Misinformation, Social Media, Youth, Arunachal Pradesh

Introduction

India's digital transformation has reached to an unprecedented height today, which has shaped nation's technological and social landscape. With numbers of internet users increasing day by day, India have reached approximately 886 million online users, according to the IMAI and Kantar report, 2025. To expand the internet connectivity, under the Digital India Initiative, internet has now reached to 95.15% of India's 6.44 lakh villages (PIB, 2024). With this rapid expansion, even traditionally remote state like Arunachal Pradesh has been integrated into the worldwide digital fabric.

As online platforms now play a central role in education, communication, commerce, and entertainment, it has opened new avenues for the youth to learn and showcase their talent globally as more and more people are connecting online. In the report titled 'Internet in India 2024', published by IMAI and Kantar, 2025, it is suggested among the country's 886 million

online users, nearly 74% are active social media users, and 83% consume OTT content. With 140 million using AI-powered apps like Google Assistant or Alexa regularly, voice-assisted technologies are also on the rise, main users being in the age bracket of 25-44. This widespread digital engagement points towards the new way of socialization among in today's modern day world, which is through technology.

Furthermore, with this technological advancement a blur line between virtual and physical realities can be witnessed. The way users interact, behave and think are now are constantly shaped by digital interfaces. Social media platforms, mobile applications and online games often encourages compulsive usage by emotionally stimulating the users and providing them instant gratification and validation (Liu, Yi, & Jiang, 2023). This tendency is particularly evident among youth, who adapts quickly to digital technologies but lack critical tools which is necessary for self-regulations.

In the specific context of Arunachal Pradesh, this pattern is increasingly evident. Rapid expansion of digital infrastructure has made internet accessible, enabling youth to participate in digital ecosystems for learning new skills, entertainment and socialization in general. However, this progress in digital transformation comes with challenges. Uncontrolled and obsessive online engagement, which can be termed as digital addiction, is growing among the state's youth population. Simultaneously social media has become a dominant medium through which information is consumed.

Moreover, as more number of individuals are seen spending their leisure time on social media, it was during the COVID-19 pandemic the daily screen time and social media usage nearly doubled (Sultana et al., 2021). Frequent use of social media further has the potential to create an environment that leads to compulsive behaviour and psychological addiction, especially for the younger generation. Additionally, while social media offers real-time communication and worldwide information, online platforms have become a breeding ground for misinformation. Through online social networks, misleading and false contents spread easily, which results into confusion and chaos in the society (Aïmeur, Amri & Brassard, 2023). Unregulated spread of misinformation through digital platforms threatens individual mental-wellbeing as well as the integrity of public discourse. This is particularly concerning for regions like Arunachal Pradesh which is culturally diverse and geopolitically sensitive.

Despite the growing ubiquity of internet usage in Arunachal Pradesh, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how digital addiction and misinformation are jointly affecting the region's population. More challenges like identity conflict, decreased face-to-face interaction and reduced participation in traditional community life due to blending of global and local narratives in this digital era remain a serious issue. The problem is concerning as the region has little to no digital literacy to critically evaluate the information they consume and share. Thus, as the digital landscape continues to expand in Arunachal Pradesh, there is a need to understand and address these intertwined phenomena as it effects generations of all age.

Methodology

The present study has employed mixed-method approach, by using data from both primary source through distribution of online-questionnaire as well as existing source of literatures such as research articles, government reports and newspaper article relevant to the Arunachal Pradesh's and India's scenario on digital era.

Given the vastness of the generational discourse, the sample size of the in the present study is a total of 54 youth respondents between ages 20-29. Of which 55per cent (30 out of 54) were between 25-29 years and 44.4 per cent (24) were between 20-24 years. Demographic profile revealed 59.3 per cent (32) were female and 40.7 per cent (22) were male, of which 48.1 per cent (26) were post-graduates and 44.4 per cent (24) were graduate students and 3.7 per cent (2) being diploma and college students each. The respondents were included from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh like East Kameng, Lower Subansiri, Tirap, Upper Subansiri, and Papumpare etc. located in semi-urban, urban and rural areas with 44.4 per cent (24), 37 per cent (20) and 18.5 per cent (5) respectively.

Findings

Digital Addiction: Navigating Digital Realities in Arunachal Pradesh

Over the time, digital platforms have impacted the way people work, learn and socialize with one another. At the core of online platforms it is the algorithms that personalize contents for the users by exploiting psychological patterns, along with features like targeted ads, auto play and visually appealing contents that encourage prolonged screen time, often without user being aware (Zhang et al., 2022).

It is further during the COVID-19 pandemic the use of social media was intensified, which persist even beyond the pandemic. These online systems are developed in such a way that it is effective in targeting youth who lack critical maturity or tools to analyse the content, especially the one who are the so-called 'digital natives' like individuals born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, also known as Generations Y (Millennial) and individuals born between 1997-2012 and 2010-2024, also known as Generations Z, and Generations Alpha (Post-Millennial) respectively. These generations are the one who have grown up with constant access to digital media, switching constantly between different social media platforms, which has resulted into decreased attention span. In Arunachal Pradesh as well, the behavioural shift is quite observable.

In the study, the respondents were asked about the time spent online daily, to which majority 55.6 per cent spent more than 6 hours, 37 per cent spent 4-6 hours and only 7.4 per cent spent 1-4 hours online. For majority (88.9 per cent), primary reason to use online platforms was for entertainment (See

Table 1: Reasons for using Online **Platforms**). Additionally, as predicted, almost all the respondents, a total of 96.3 per cent agreed having difficulty while studying or working due to

internet use, and 88.8 per cent felt anxious without their phone and internet, and approximately one-third, that is, 29.6 per cent agreed that screen time has reduced their offline interaction.

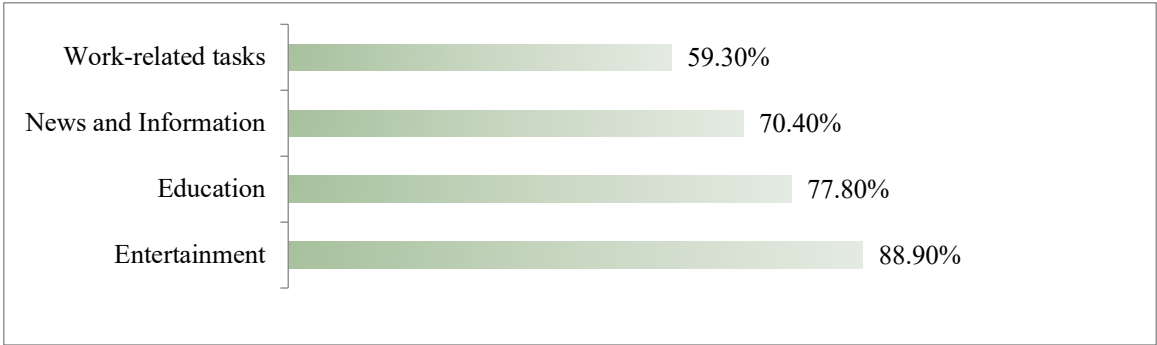


Table 1: Reasons for using Online Platforms

This shows that digital consumption among youth is significantly high, with a major focus on entertainment rather than educational. This pattern may be indicative of digital addiction, which raises concern related to mental as well as physical health well-being and overexposure to misinformation. This also indicates how extensive use of internet has impacting one’s academic/work performance.

Misinformation: A Parallel Threat

Parallel to digital addiction is the growing threat of misinformation. Today social media platforms have increasingly evolved from mere entertainment to public discourse including news and opinions. However, the line between facts and fictions remain unclear. According to IAMAI and Kantar report 2024, out of India’s 886 million internet users, 582 million (66%) encounter news through apps, websites, social media, and YouTube. While only 180 million (20%) actively reach out and evaluate the news they consume. The rest are passive consumers of the contents provided to them, making them vulnerable to false information.

Now misinformation, whether spread deliberately or unintentionally thrives in algorithm-driven environments. Contents that evoke strong emotions such as fear, anger or curiosity are more likely to be shared among the youths as well as among older generations, regardless of how accurate the contents are. In states like Arunachal Pradesh, where formal digital programs are still evolving, the risk of digital misinformation is high.

When asked whether the respondents have witnessed false information online, almost all, 92.6 % agreed to witnessing false information and one-third, that is, 33.3 per cent claimed to spread false information unintentionally, of which only 25.9 per cent check the source before sharing information. The respondents were further asked about the social media platforms that spreads most misinformation according to them. To which a vast majority, 81.5 per cent responded Facebook as the number one platform for misinformation, followed by Whatsapp (66.7 per

cent) and Instagram (44.4 per cent). Twitter, now known as X handle remains to be the least agreed upon platform for spread of false information (See Table 2).

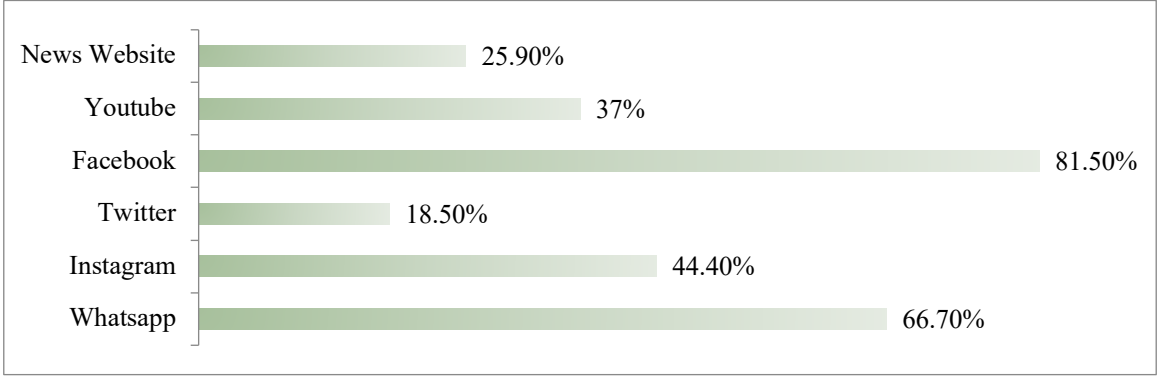


Table 2: Sources for spreading Misinformation

Furthermore, 40.7 per cent of the respondents agreed this misinformation have caused communal tension in the society causing disharmony between communities as well as within the community members. For instance, in April 2025 a fake Facebook account spread false information about the health status of a victim in the Banderdewa incident where a fish vendor was attacked with machete by a tribal man of Arunachal Pradesh which led to unrest been Arunachalees and Assamese (“Police apprehend”, 2025). Another manipulated video was falsely circulated showing U.S. President Donald Trump discussing the RSS and an Arunachal tribe, further contributing to public confusion (NDTV, 2025). Incidents like these, trend over the internet as it evokes strong emotions among public.

Additionally, when asked if the respondents are aware of any fact checking tools like Alt News, BOOM Fact Check etc., 92.6 per cent responded they are unaware and therefore 37 per cent showed the urge to attend digital literacy workshops in the region, while 51.9 per cent responded they may join the workshops.

These results suggest social media platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram etc. causes misinformation across all generations, where individuals lack proper digital knowledge before sharing information. Sharing and spreading misinformation online has led to communal tension in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and therefore, there is a need to address the issue of digital addiction and misinformation at the earliest.

Conclusion

In this digitally saturated environment, Marshal McLuhan’s vision of the “Global Village” has undeniably come into existence. The idea that digital landscape compresses time and space and allows people to communicate instantly by sharing experiences across the world has been materialized. Likewise, state like Arunachal Pradesh is now a part of same digital ecosystem as global cities, however, this virtual proximity brings both empowerment and vulnerability. As internet usage is increasing in Arunachal Pradesh, the scope for digital addiction especially among youth remains significantly high. There is a need to understand the roots and

repercussion of such addiction as it relates to one's productivity, affecting well-being of the users. Another major challenge along digital addiction is the spread misinformation. Unregulated misinformation can further escalate into communal tension leading to public unrest and polarization. Therefore, the study is not merely a behavioural concern but an effort to safeguarding the cognitive as well as cultural integrity of Arunachal's tribe and its digital future.

Thus, the author recommends healthier digital engagement and digital literacy in formal curricula such as schools, colleges and universities, youth led-digital advocacy community, localized research for monitoring digital behavioural patterns among different tribal youths of Arunachal, and Public-Private collaboration for internet regulations such as online safety features.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study is significant as it contributes to the limited but growing body of literature on digital behaviour in Arunachal Pradesh. By focusing on Arunachal Pradesh, the study informs the stakeholders including educators, policy makers, community leaders as well as youths of Arunachal about the risk associated with unregulated digital consumption. However, the study has its limitations.

This study is limited to 54 respondents only in the age bracket of 20-29. As the study did not include adolescents as well as older generations, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of Arunachal Pradesh. With the knowledge that digital space impacts all generation irrespective of age, gender, tribe, literate or illiterate, the topic has vast scope for future researchers. Therefore, delving deeper into digital usage pattern across different tribes, age group, and other such aforementioned categories of Arunachal Pradesh are suggested.

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