

# **ADOLESCENT SUBCULTURES**

&

# **SMARTPHONES**

Exploring the Implications for  
Gender, Sexuality and Rights

Lakshmi Lingam  
Isha Bhallamudi and Neomi Rao



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# Adolescent Subcultures & Smartphones

Exploring the Implications for  
Gender, Sexuality and Rights

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8th June 2018



unicef



for every child

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## FOREWORD

This exploratory study "Youth Subcultures and Smartphones: Exploring the implications for Gender, Sexuality and Rights" undertaken by Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and supported by UNICEF, Maharashtra comes at a critical time when there is much debate surrounding the area of adolescents and young people in the digital space.

This study engaged with young people and their families to gain insights into popular perceptions of the impact of smartphone technology on urban adolescents and perceptions around the use of mobile phones. The findings point out to the need for development of progressive policies that enhance online safety, reduce risks and empower young people – women and men; so that they are equipped and confident to participate fully and equally.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, that monitors implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has in its General Comment No. 20 (2016) recognised that social and digital media are increasingly becoming the primary means through which young people communicate and receive, create and disseminate information.

This study offers a link and points ways to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 16 that aspire to reduce inequalities and promote peace, justice and strong institutions that centre on protecting children, adolescents and young people, provide access to quality services including health and reproductive care and empower adolescents to channel their energy, enthusiasm and creativity to make life better for themselves and the world.



Rajeshwari Chandrasekar

*Chief of Field Office  
UNICEF, Maharashtra*

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Lakshmi Lingam  
Isha Bhallamudi and  
Neomi Rao

8th June 2018

# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

Among the contemporary innovations that have brought about a sea change in the way we live, work and love, the contribution of mobile phone technologies (cell phone and the latest smartphones) are phenomenal. The reach of people to information and communications is changing the scope of businesses and the limits of physical distances. Coupled with information technologies, mobile phone technologies are likely to revolutionize social relations and interactions. Among the age cohorts that have taken to mobile technologies, adolescents and youth are one of the largest users and consumers. This is the group that also has the potential to redefine social norms, practices and beliefs and have a far-reaching impact on social structure.



Mobile phones are an increasingly popular method of communication and socialization among young people globally. Due to the characteristics of the technology: accessibility, low-cost, privacy and relative anonymity, mobile media and technology have become synonymous with an era characterized by digitized forms of communication. Young people use mobile phones as an effective means of communicating economic, social and political identity. They also use mobile phones to create, maintain and manage interpersonal relationships. Owning a mobile phone is an important rites-de-passage into youth and brings with it a sense of identity, personhood, privacy and freedom.

Mobile phones are an increasingly popular method of communication and socialization among young people globally. Due to the characteristics of the technology: accessibility, low-cost, privacy and relative anonymity; mobile media and technology have become synonymous with an era characterized by digitized forms of communication.

Through media platforms, young people are able to forge new connections with the resources and knowledge embedded within digital spaces, which are not governed by their immediate familial and social norms. This is giving rise to interesting contradictions, worth understanding and exploring. While the mobile revolution is heralded by the markets and projected as hip, happening and sexy, the sexual revolution is generally viewed through moral anxieties and health implications.

### **What is the data on youth/adolescent population in India?\***

#### **2nd largest mobile phone users in world**

India is the second largest country to own mobile phones in the world and has the largest youth population globally: over 54% of the population is under 25 years and over 70% is under 35 years.

#### **19% young population**

Youth (age 15-24) population of India is 232 million (19% of total population) as of 2011. 74 million or 31.9% of youth live in urban areas

#### **50% users under 25**

There are 219 million projected smartphone users in urban India (371 million smartphone users total). About 50% of smartphone users are under age 25. Increasing number of youth in India possess more than one mobile phone.

#### **100 ml. young urban smartphone user**

Therefore, we can estimate ~100 million urban Indian youth are smartphone users

## Background Definitions

**Smartphone:** Mobile/Cell phone are nouns used to refer to cordless phones linked to cellular towers to receive and transmit calls and messages. A smartphone is a mobile phone device that has multiple features that enable its uses in a variety of ways beyond calling and receiving calls and messages. This device connected to a mobile sim card or wifi enabled can provide instantaneous, cheap, mobile internet access allowing the transmission of communication and information across the globe.

**Youth/adolescent:** According to the United Nations, youth are aged 15-29 years and adolescents are aged 10-19 years. For our purposes, we will be considering any individual within the age range 10 – 15 years as an adolescent and all individuals within the age range 14 – 19 years to be a 'young person'.

**Moral Panic:** A periodic, recurring phenomenon that involves volatile discourse over a widespread, disproportionate concern stemming from social anxiety that an established system of values is under threat and a cherished way of life is in jeopardy. Examples of past moral panic-inducing technologies include: the printing press, telegraph & telephone

**Media analysis:** Media and news reports are beneficiaries of alarmist narratives generated by profitable controversies as well as acting as a filter and amplifier on whose voice gets to enter and influence the mainstream discourse. Therefore, they are exemplary cultural documents for understanding how public discourse and cultural logics contribute to social meanings.

## Mobile Youth Culture

Apart from using phones for calling, texting and messaging through apps like WhatsApp, smartphones with features like a camera, high internet speeds like 3G and 4G enable fast transfer and downloading of images, potential to surf the internet for a variety of information, a presence on social media sites (like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and so on,) live streaming, playing games, watching films, teleserials, sports and pornography.

## Relationships and Self-Identity

Possession and use of smartphones has become an indispensable personal item for young people, even an extension of their self and personal identity. The features available on the smartphone in possession of a person convey the user's modernity, style, affordability and accessibility. It facilitates independence and privacy of an individual. It enables youth to coordinate, initiate and maintain relationships.

Crucially, mobile media allows adolescents and young people to move beyond physiological and geographical barriers in their construction of the self and how they wish to be seen.

Crucially, mobile media allows adolescents and young people to move beyond physiological and geographical barriers in their construction of the self and how they wish to be seen. This significant act in perceptions of the self (and consequently of communities) is often accompanied by a transformation in how people express and perform various aspects of their life. This also gives rise to the possibility of subversion and emancipation from surveillance and from rigid social norms, which often leads to conflict as young people struggle to establish their independence and freedom from the authority structures in their lives.

## Gendered Realities of Mobile Phone Usage

Gender is now performed through a proliferating network within which humans, machines and other actors are entangled (Cupples and Thompson 2010). The digital revolution coupled with mobile phones create discourses of masculinity and femininity using a number of cultural texts, including song lyrics, music videos, interviews and photographs (Batson-Savage 2007). These rapidly proliferating

1. Cupples, Julie, and Lee Thompson. "Heterotextuality and digital foreplay: Cell phones and the culture of teenage romance." *Feminist Media Studies* 10.1 (2010): 1-17.

2. Batson-Savage, Tanya. "'Hol'Awn Mek a Answer mi Cellular': Sex, Sexuality and the Cellular Phone in Urban Jamaica." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 21.2 (2007): 239-251.

digital technology are also in the hands of the children, adolescents and young adults, simultaneously creating fresh challenges and possibilities.

Further, the internet and a plethora of social media sites, where women and girls are active participants, have given rise to new forms of violence against women, such as online sexual harassment, gender-based trolling, revenge porn, as well as hyper-sexualization of women. Now there is online and offline gender-based violence!

## Rights of Young People and Society

The advancement of technology and the question of sexuality together cause a strong moral panic among families and the society at large. While smartphone marketing projects the technology as hip, happening and sexy, focusing on images of independence and freedom; parents and society extricably linked with especially as the bles the bypassing thory and control. view the same as in- safety and danger smartphone ena- of parental au- These fears illumi- and attitudes sur- honour, sex and which has considerable mobile phone-based health interventions have a tremen- dous potential to minimize risky behaviours and cultivate positive health practices, their success may be compromised by this moral



While smartphone marketing projects the technology as hip, happening and sexy, focusing on images of independence and freedom; parents and society view the same as inextricably linked with safety and danger especially as the smartphone enables the bypassing of parental authority and control.

panic and social backlash towards mobile phones in the hands of young people. For such interventions to be able to fulfil their objectives, it is important that youth, parents, teachers and school authorities understand the areas of intervention that should not become moralistic or preoccupied with morbidity.

### Rationale and Objectives of the Study

In a country which has the largest number of adolescents and youth in the world, Indian youth have the greatest potential to redefine social norms, practices and beliefs and this is likely to have far-reaching impacts on social structure. Mobile phones provide a ready tool that can be employed in interventions to shape and inform adolescent health behavior, however, panics and bans on mobile phone use may compromise such possibilities. Studies viewing mobile phone culture as a youth sub-culture are urgently needed. This would bring out young people's experiences of negotiating a rapidly digitizing world from a socio-cultural landscape that remains patriarchal and norm-bound, and attempt to map the dynamic technological landscape being created by them

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In a country which has the largest number of adolescents and youth in the world, Indian youth have the greatest potential to redefine social norms, practices and beliefs and this is likely to have far-reaching impacts on social structure.

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### The Justification for this Research:

The legal, social and moral frameworks seem to be steadily undermining international human rights provisions that obligate Governments to "respect, protect and fulfil" rights of young people. It is important to map the ground realities.

A close examination of current trends in this area will provide a better understanding of missing aspects of Life Skills Education in the realms of awareness of the law, safe sex and gender relations and health.

Focus on this research will address Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and renewed Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, which places emphasis on the importance of improving understanding of the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents. This is crucial to ensure that adolescents not only survive but also thrive and transform their communities.

This exploratory study is conceptualized to pave way for a full-fledged research project based on its outcomes and findings.

## Outcomes of the Exploratory Study

Mapping ground realities in relation to adolescent sub-cultures and use of smartphones through

- Desk review
- Media analysis and
- Field level interactions

This report covers all the three explorations undertaken between September to December 2017.

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\* *Source:*

- *McAfee Tweens, Teens & Technology 2014 report. Internet and social media usage among youth in India. India facts. 2014.*
- *"Youth in India." Central Statistics Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, March, 2017.*
- *Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). IMRB International Report, 2015.*

# CHAPTER 1

## ***SMARTPHONES & ADOLESCENTS***

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*



## ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the current empirical and qualitative research on mobile phones and adolescents, through a study of 67 papers. The review focuses on India and especially tries to understand gendered and class effects within this landscape. It aims to identify gaps in the current research approaches, and identify fresh perspectives and lenses to apply to the notions of risk, safety, sexuality, moral panic, surveillance and use of mobile phones by adolescents.

### Objectives of the Literature Review



1. Critically map current research space and emerging areas of study
2. Identify disjunctions in current research and areas for further research
3. Identify fresh lenses or perspectives which can be applied to study this field

### Key questions explored by this review:

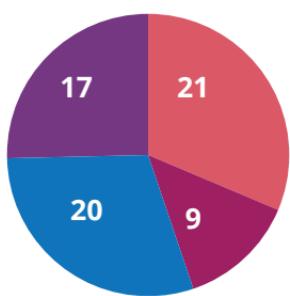
- What is current research telling us about mobile phones and adolescents?
- Do mobile phones empower or constrain adolescents, and in what ways, and to what ends?
  - Must these two outcomes be held within a binary?
- How can the moral panic surrounding mobile phone use of adolescents be understood, and is it justified by the evidence?
- How do these dynamics differ across gender and class?
- Finally, what do adolescents themselves say? How do they locate themselves within this shifting digital and social landscape of risk, panic, empowerment and opportunity?



What are the current understandings and dynamics operating around adolescents and smartphones, with respect to notions of risk, safety, sexuality, empowerment, moral panic and surveillance?

## Methodology

- Papers were first selected on the basis of multiple targeted key word searches on online databases
- A qualitative research analysis was carried out on the selected papers
- The papers were further narrowed down on the basis of the following criteria:
  - Papers that covered the adolescent age group between 10-19 years
  - Papers published from 2005 onwards
  - Papers that addressed the following themes:"
    - Mobile phones and health impacts
    - Social relationships
    - Gendered aspects of use
    - Family, moral panics and anxieties
    - Risk and surveillance &
    - Opportunities for empowerment.
  - Studies carried out across the globe, but majority focus on India and the Global South
- Longlist of 118 papers, shortlist of 67 core papers
  - 25 empirical/quantitative papers
  - 35 qualitative papers
  - 7 theoretical papers
- Duration of research: Sept-Dec 2017

**Geographical Concentration of Studies**

■ India  
■ Global South (other than India)  
■ Global North  
■ Not Mentioned

**Sector-wise Split-up (within India)**

## Characteristics of the Data Set

- In all, 25 papers covering empirical studies have been reviewed, including 3 reviews.
- The age range of adolescents is extremely inconsistent across studies (covering 10 to 19 years) with different emphasis on age groups and terminologies like 'adolescents', 'teens', 'tweens' and so on.
- Research methods mostly involve linear or logistic regression. Sample sizes vary from 35 to 96000.
- Majority of the papers selected are from India (21) with few papers from other countries which include Japan, China, USA, Belgium, etc.
- The majority of research on this topic relies on self-reported data from school-going children and adolescents. While the socio-economic class of participants is rarely specified, it appears that the majority of participants belong to higher socioeconomic classes.

## Recurrent Concerns Explored in Research

### 1. Prevalence and modes of use



Adolescents use mobile phones in a variety of ways to fulfil their needs, develop and exhibit their identities, explore social relationships, expand learning and opportunities, resist social norms and defy parental controls. (Nurullah 2009; Valkenburg and Peter 2009; Campbell and Park 2008; Singh and Jain 2017; Matanhelia 2010; Donner et al 2008).

### 2. Cyberbullying and violence



Cyberbullying by and of adolescents is on the rise, but it is unclear whether the prevalence is higher than that of (non-cyber) bullying. (Venkataraghavan 2015; Calvete et al 2010; David-Ferdon and Hertz 2007).



### 3. Addiction and problematic use

Mobile phone addiction is not well defined or understood, yet research seems to point in the direction of increasing prevalence of problematic mobile phone use in adolescents. Still, the lines between overuse, misuse, dependence, and addiction are not specified in research studies. (Tsitsika et al 2014; Leung 2008; Sansone 2013).

### 4. Sleep quality



Adolescents across the world are using the mobile phone into the night, reducing and affecting quality of sleep, in turn affecting various indicators of health and learning. (Munezawa et al 2011; Van den Bulck 2007; Soni et al 2017; Cain and Gradisar 2010).

### 5. Personal stress and anxiety



A variety of new terms have been coined to reflect phenomena where being away from mobile phones causes young people panic and anxiety: "ringxiety", "nomophobia", etc. At the same time shy and socially anxious teens find solace in indirect communication afforded by phones. (Gezgin and Cakir 2016; Subba et al 2013; Pundir et al 2016; Pierce 2010).

## 6. Education, Skill-gathering, Health



More and more interventions are exploring the use of mobile phones to improve adolescent learning, health-seeking and information gathering, and skill-gathering. (Guse et al 2014; Skinner et al 2003; Froisland et al 2012; Woolford et al 2010; Riley et al 2010; Saramola 2015).

Broadly: most empirical research focuses on the adverse effects of mobile phones on adolescents. There is little work exploring its positive potential. Might this be skewing the scope of research and findings?

### Review of Qualitative Research

Most research examining adolescents and mobile phones tends to omit the voices of adolescents themselves. In exploring the broad questions of the review, we find distinct narratives emerging from various stakeholders: parents, community members, adolescents themselves. Where do these narratives converge and diverge?

### Mapping Research by Social Considerations

#### Use of Cell Phones, Family and Relationships

##### Factors affecting use

*Class and gender influence access and ownership of mobile phones - it is an aspirational goal.*

(Tenhunen 2008; Potnis 2016; Rangaswamy and Cuttrell 2011)

##### Prevalence of use

*Mobile phones allow adolescents to cross socio-cultural barriers and access education, skills, employment, health info, etc. against the odds*

(Rangaswamy and Cuttrell 2011; Lee and Jayachandran 2009; Pain et al 2005)

#### Risk, Surveillance and Control

How do parents, schools and society perceive risk? How do adolescents perceive and navigate moral panic?

*The two groups perceive very different causes of risk from mobile phones and strategies for managing it; there is little communication bridging the two*

##### Surveillance

*To be online is to be surveilled by big data structures in a variety of ways. Online data cannot be erased. Adolescents want to stay connected, but recognize the risks of constant data surveillance*

(Pain et al 2005; Kovac 2017)

Meaning-making around cell phone use: family dynamics and differences b/w adolescents and parents

*both understand privacy, safety and risk differently; adolescents are technological innovators in the home; parents are unable to keep up/ digitally illiterate, leading to moral panic and fear*

(Donner et al 2008; Cranor et al 2014; Ey and Cupit 2011; Daramola 2015; Vittrup et al 2016)

Bans on mobile phones for girls and young women: tradition VS modernity

*An acute moral tension over girls taking control of their sexuality, has led to village bans and family surveillance on women's use of mobiles across India - seen as bad influences from "the West". Girls resist this through their own strategies.*

(Kovac 2017; Singh 2016; Nayantara 2016; Cassell and Cramer 2008)

Subversive tactics; creative uses

*For parents, mobile phones offer a chance for control and 24\*7 monitoring of young people, while for adolescents they represent freedom; under this juxtaposition adolescents subvert and defy parental controls in a variety of ways*

(Weir 2006; Pain et al 2005; Berkman Center 2011; Donner et al 2008)

Privacy, safety and confidentiality in context of participatory surveillance

*Surveillance can be friendly and participatory: such as girls and women looking out for each other online, sharing safety strategies and helping each other access online spaces*

(Albrechtslund 2008; Kovac 2017)

Peer relationships, self-identity, romance, sex: potential for reinvention

*mobile phones help adolescents experiment with their identities and social relationships; rewrite scripts of femininity and masculinity; redefine norms of "dating", "romance", "sex"*

(Batson-Savage 2007; Ringrose and Barajas 2011; Gaby and Cambre 2016; Curnutt 2012)

## Girls and Mobile Phones in India

- A range of societal barriers prevent or limit the ownership of and access to mobile phones among girls.
- When moral panic and concern for safety takes away mobile phone access from girls, they also lose out on considerable opportunities for empowerment.
- Moral panic focuses mainly on girls, due to a perceived risk over their emerging sexuality



### Tradition vs Modernity: Moral Panic is About Controlling Girls' Sexuality

Moral panic takes the form of controlling and banning the use of mobile phones by girls and women, justified as being for their own good, to protect them from their own sexuality and from men. In this context, mobile phones are often seen as a Western invention and placed in opposition to traditional culture.

No such restrictions prevail on men and boys, and a corresponding anxiety over their use of mobile phones is completely absent, considering that it is their correspondence with girls that is the apparent cause of the moral panic. At a time when the government is aggressively pushing its Digital India agenda and its Beti Bachao Andolan, this clash between traditional culture and the perceived threat of modernity has been coming to a head through an intense policing of young girls' technology use. In reinforcing traditional gender barriers in reaction to the dangers of 'Western values', the gender gaps in

mobile phone ownership and use continue to expand. More broadly, across the various discourses used to justify curbing women's use of mobile technology, the underlying patriarchal moral panic over the possibility of female independence and sexual choices is very much at the core.

Moral panics over mobile phones are not new but age-old, concentrated around anxieties over female sexuality, control and surveillance. Thus, mobile phones are not the cause of new panics but a site, which reshape existing anxieties of society and parents.

### Moral Panic - Then

The telephone not only created "unprecedented opportunities for courting and infidelity, but for romancing unacceptable persons outside one's own class and race in circumstances that went unobserved by the regular community." It was commonly feared that these women might attract the wrong sorts of men and that they were unaware of the powerful consequences of their appropriation of the technology." (pp. 61, Cassell and Cramer 2008)

### Moral Panic - Now

"The female users have virtually no agency in the media responses to crimes. While they are ascribed roles of naivete, innocence, or delinquency in the media, in actuality, they turn out to be active and informed consumers and producers of mediated conversations and texts. The important identity construction, self-efficacy, and social network production work that they do online is not only largely ignored, but too often condemned". (pp. 54, Cassell and Cramer 2008)



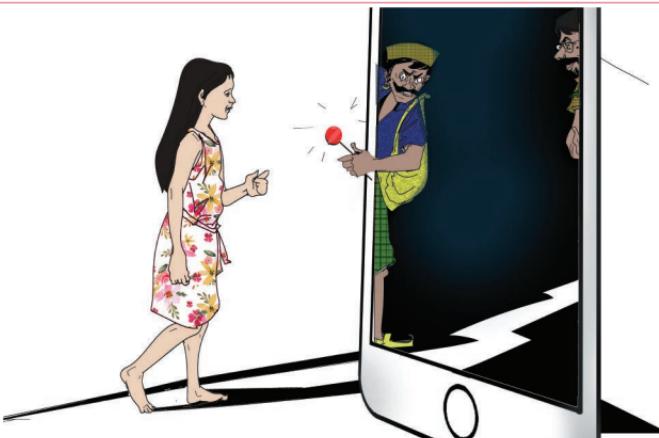
We find that moral panic over women and girls' use of new communication technology is in fact age-old! However, it is presented as a brand new set of fears and anxieties, and this is rarely questioned in the research literature.



## Key Take Aways from the Review

### Mobile Phones: A Medium and a Mirror, but not a Cause

- Mobile phones in themselves may not be causing or removing risks but instead are mirroring the existing risks to adolescents in the physical world; in such a context the artefact of the mobile phone is itself becoming a site of victimization, panic or perceived security.
- Evidence suggests that the majority of crimes experienced by young people are perpetrated by people known to them, not by strangers lurking on the internet, and
- Adolescents develop their own risk navigation strategies to effectively deal with any online soliciting.



### Smart Phones and Family: Contradicting Requirements of Freedom and Control, Safety and Risk Clash

- Smart phones have been incorporated in culturally appropriate ways in both the family context and on an individual basis by both parents and adolescents, mediated by gender and class.
- Smart phones have become part of the ongoing struggles between adolescents and adults, representing both freedom and increased control, providing novel ways to court risk, subvert parental surveillance and navigate societal expectations and rules.



## Adverse Effects of Smart Phones: Magnified and Sensationalized

- People of different ages, classes, genders, communities and so on, tend to use mobile phones in a variety of culturally and socially mediated ways.
- The adverse effects linked to high use of smart phones are not specific or exclusive to adolescents, but apply to every mobile phone user: adult, adolescent and child.
- Sensationalised reporting over adolescent use of mobile phones tend to cloud this fact in magnifying the vulnerabilities of adolescents to these adverse effects.

## Important Gaps in the Literature

There is a severe gap in the literature pertaining to adolescents' own experiences of using mobile phones, their perceptions of risk and risk management strategies and this is particularly acute in the case of female adolescents, who tend to bear the weight of the moral panic over mobile phones. Further gaps are:

1. Inconsistent terminology and sample sizes, as well as undeclared variables (class, sector, etc.)
2. Confusion between use of and access to mobile phones: the two often treated as interchangeable
3. Hyperinflation of risks, underrepresentation and invisibilization of potential, with respect to adolescent mobile phone use
4. Moral panic depicted as new but it is age-old: research builds on unfounded stereotypes, affecting quality of findings
5. Very little work on communicative and educational approaches towards reducing risk

## Future directions for Research

1. What are adolescents' own experiences and feelings about the role of the mobile phone in accessing social mobility, health information, education, employment and skills? (mediated by gender and class)
2. In what ways can the mobile phone be a way for girls to sidestep physical mobility constraints through the virtual world?
3. How is participatory surveillance enacted in practice to ensure peer safety among adolescents?
4. What are the strategies employed by adolescent girls to sidestep moral panic, avoid barriers to access and use, and ensure safety?
5. Comparative analysis of protectionist versus educative approaches towards adolescents and smartphones
6. What methodologies will work best with adolescent and young men in conducting research on this subject?

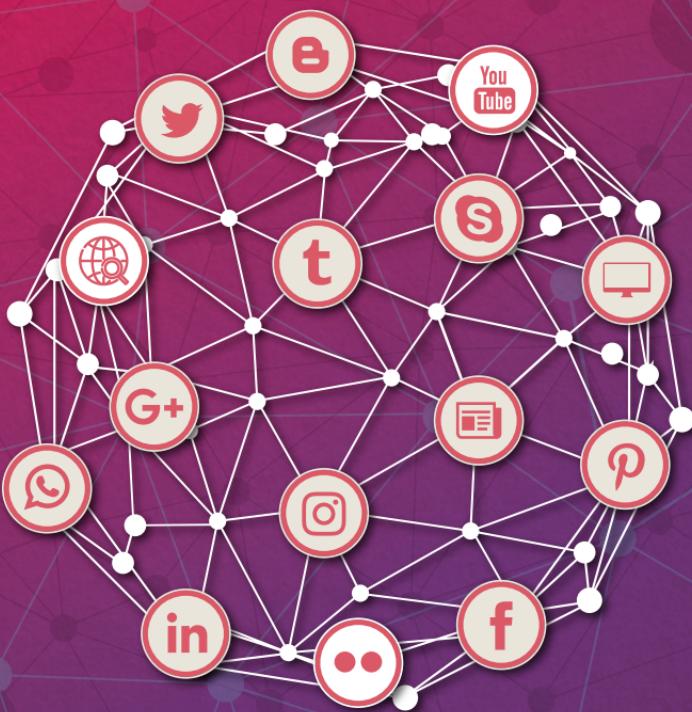
## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the review call for a shift from a default response of controlling, surveillance and restricting as a way of allaying moral panic, to employing strategies that rely on open communication, awareness and information dissemination. Such an approach may truly empower adolescents to navigate the risks in their lives and to transition into adulthood as individuals who can make informed decisions, rather than stunting their capabilities to do so.

## CHAPTER 2

# ***URBAN INDIAN YOUTH & SMARTPHONES***

*PRINT AND ONLINE MEDIA ANALYSIS*



## ABSTRACT

Examining print and online media is a means to gauge popular perceptions of the impact of smartphone technology on the physical, psychological, and social well-being of urban Indian adolescents. The overarching media narratives of anxiety and moral panic about adolescents' smartphone use reveals a societal fear of loss of control posed by young people's easy access to the internet. Meanwhile, emerging positive perspectives about smartphones show the way towards potential benefits for youth.

## Methodology

- **Ethnographic Content Analysis - Qualitative Media Analysis:** The researcher repeatedly reads, creates protocols for annotation, and selects case studies from the relevant texts, in order to situate the analysis in the cultural milieu and provide a richer understanding of the themes, frames, and discourse characterizing mass media.<sup>1</sup>
- Searched primary keywords (see Keywords Table) using LexisNexis and Google News search engines, limiting the search to articles published in 2014 or later.
- Compiled selected articles and annotated each according to an initial draft protocol (Annotated labels: Title; Source; Publication date; Source country; Access tool; Access date; Country(s) included in the article).
- Each article was closely re-read and further annotated according to a second version draft protocol (Annotated labels: Brief description; Types of individuals quoted (e.g. medical professional); Article type (e.g. opinion, feature, etc.); Source type (e.g. newspaper, digital news); Themes (e.g. topics of gender, addiction, surveillance, etc. commonly found throughout articles).
- A second search for primary and secondary keywords (see Keywords Table) using LexisNexis and Google News search engines, and searching within identified news sites, for articles published in or after 2014.

<sup>1</sup> David L. Altheide, and Christopher J. Schneider, *Qualitative Media Analysis*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2013.

- Each article was closely re-read and further annotated according to a third version draft protocol (Annotated labels: Frames (e.g. dangers of technology, benefits of technology)).
- Based on emerging themes, narratives, and frames, a total of 20 articles were selected as case studies for deeper analysis.

In total, 95 articles were coded and analyzed, but the number of articles that met the selection criteria was 70. Representative case studies for in-depth analysis were 20.

### State-wise Cell Phone Ban Search Methodology

During the overall media analysis research, the topic of cell phone bans at the community, school, and governmental levels emerged as a significant theme for Indian adolescents and young people. In order to fully investigate the prevalence of these bans, an additional search series was conducted.

- Using LexisNexis and Google search engines, a keyword for each Indian state together with "cell phone ban" was searched. For instance, a sample search was "Kerala cell phone ban."
- State-wise results were tabulated according to whether news or government reports of each state described cell phone bans at the community level or government school level.
- For bans in government schools, data was collected on whether these bans applied to students, teachers, or both.

### Keywords Table

Table 1: Primary and secondary keywords used

Primary keywords		Secondary keywords	
smartphone	youth	sex	health
cell phone	young people	gender	addiction
mobile phone	adolescent(s)	violence	ban
technology	teen(s)	caste	[each Indian state]
social media	teenager(s)		
internet	India(n)		

Note: The secondary keyword "[each Indian state]" refers to the state-by-state search for cell phone bans in India. The series of searches were conducted by linking "cell phone ban" with each state.

# Dangerous Technologies: Moral Panic and Pseudoscience in the Media

## New Terminology



The variety of new jargon to describe the problems and solutions of smartphone misuse shows the emerging nature of the discourse around this subject. While much of the terminology focuses around addiction to the internet and technology, none of the source articles managed to note that addiction is a strictly-defined medical term and “internet addiction” is not recognized as a legitimate condition or disorder by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). By inappropriately using a medical term that describes a severe condition, media is complicit in

2 Anonna Dutt and Sadaguru Pandit, "Caught in the web of online addiction: Youth succumbing to new form of dependence," *Hindustan Times*, September 5, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/caught-in-web-of-online-addiction-youth-succumbing-to-new-form-of-dependence/story-VHtvb9M1ED-mF8rsFHsnhL.html>

3 Aditi Pai, "Smartphone Slaves," *India Today*, September 28, 2015, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20150928-smartphone-slaves-820454-1999-11-30>

4 "Beware! Smartphones uses raising mental disorder," *Afternoon Voice*, January 10, 2017, <http://www.afternoonvoice.com/beware-smartphones-uses-raising-mental-disorder.html>.

5 Shyama Rajagopal, "Internet addiction in teens spawning psychological problem," *The Hindu*, September 27, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/internet-addiction-in-teens-spawning-psychological-problem/article6452139.ece>.

## Key Themes that Emerge in Media

### Extreme Cases

"9-year-old boy had to be admitted to a city hospital after he cut his arm with a kitchen knife because his parents took away his cell phone."

Hindustan Times (September 5, 2017)<sup>6</sup>

"The case of a child who started getting seizures because of lack of sleep due to addiction to Facebook."

Dr. Anoop Vincent, associate professor, Sree Narayana Institute of Medical Sciences<sup>7</sup>

Extreme incidents are an effective strategy to bring attention to a potential new phenomenon, like internet addiction. However, when they are presented without further comment, the implication is that these stories are representative of many such cases which contributes to a moral panic around internet use. We need to closely examine whether these stories actually reflect most children's behavior with smartphones.

### Cancer Scare

"Constant exposure to electromagnetic radiation interferes with cognitive memory and sleep. The heat generated from the gadget irritates the surface tissues of the skin. We have no concrete evidence yet to link tumours to mobile radiation."

Dr. Anand Kumar, professor and head of the neurology department at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Kochi<sup>8</sup>

Physical problems are the least commonly mentioned negative impact of smartphones. Still, this article uses suggestive wording from experts with high credibility (e.g., a neurology Professor) to insinuate that smartphones can cause tumours, even while the actual quote denies this.

<sup>6</sup> Dutt and Pandit, "Caught in the web." op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Rajagopal, "Internet addiction in teens." op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> Pai, "Smartphone Slaves." op.cit.

## Lack of Sleep

"It's like a drug, but it is digital. It can make people numb, increase uncontrollable cravings and interfere with the brain's functioning. If you don't get restful sleep, it affects your digestive system and causes neurological changes in the long run."

Janki Mehta, psychotherapist and co-founder of Mumbai-based Mind Mandala <sup>9</sup>

"The use of internet for Facebook and WhatsApp is making people put off sleep by more than one and a half hours (100 minutes) every day."

2016 study by the Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) clinic at the National Institute of Medical Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) <sup>10</sup>

Only one article uses scientific evidence to support its assertion that smartphones negatively impact physical well-being by showing the link between smartphone use and lack of sleep, which creates subsequent health problems.

## Link to Substance Abuse

"Lack of supervision and monitoring at home lets children get their way with Internet and substance abuse. Every child is at risk. Sometimes peer pressure alone could be a factor for addiction."

Dr. C. J. John, the president of the State branch of Indian Psychiatric Society <sup>11</sup>

"[Internet use is] like a drug, but it is digital."

Janki Mehta, psychotherapist and co-founder of Mumbai-based Mind Mandala <sup>12</sup>

Here, being online is both insinuated and directly equated to drug addiction, a bold theory that is not supported by any scientific evidence. The first quote suggests the linkage by placing the two in the same sentence and suggesting that they show similar trends. The second openly states that internet and drug addiction go hand-in-hand.

<sup>9</sup> Kamani Mathai, "Apps, social media pushing back sleep time over 1.5 hours," Times of India, March 18, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/apps-social-media-pushing-back-sleep-time-over-1-5-hours/articleshow/57696886.cms>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Rajagopal, "Internet addiction in teens." op.cit.

## Smartphone or Scapegoat?

"Mobile phones may seem cool, but they are actually making our teenagers unsmart, especially those in the age group of 14-18 who are unable to read a basic text in their vernacular languages.

*The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for the rural populace, drawn from the survey carried out in 28 districts over 24 states, throws up many shocking details. It shows how addiction to phones has clouded the youngsters' minds and ruining their future."*

DNA Editorial: Phoney Pursuits (January 18, 2018)<sup>13</sup>

This editorial encapsulates the media moral panic surrounding adolescents' smartphone use. By taking several unfounded leaps of logic, the editorial somehow links the increased availability of smartphones to internet addiction to low education indicators. While many factors - including the quality of the education itself - could explain low student scores, this editorial scapegoats smartphones as the root cause without providing any supporting evidence. In fact, ASER's findings from previous years linked the poor performance of children to low availability of teachers and other factors, which are completely ignored by this editorial.

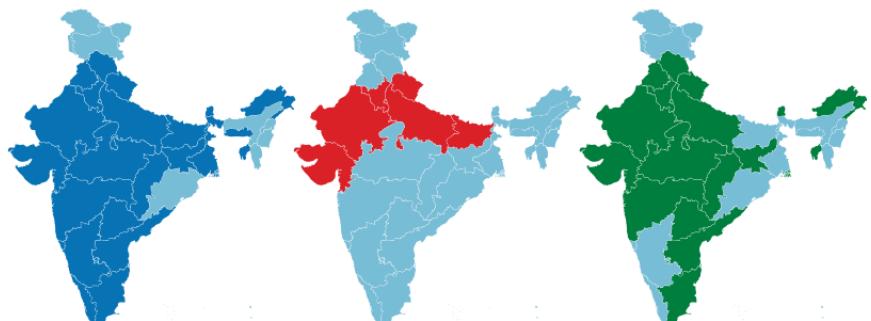
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12 Pai, "Smartphone Slaves." op.cit.

13 "DNA Edit: Phoney Pursuits," DNA India, Jan 18, 2018, <http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/editorial-dna-edit-phoney-pursuits-2576264>

14 Ranajit Bhattacharya, "The eleventh Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2016) was released in New Delhi, 18 January 2017," Pratham Education Foundation, Jan 18, 2017. [http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202016/asr2016\\_nationalpressrelease.pdf](http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202016/asr2016_nationalpressrelease.pdf)

## Mapping Cell Phone Bans Across States

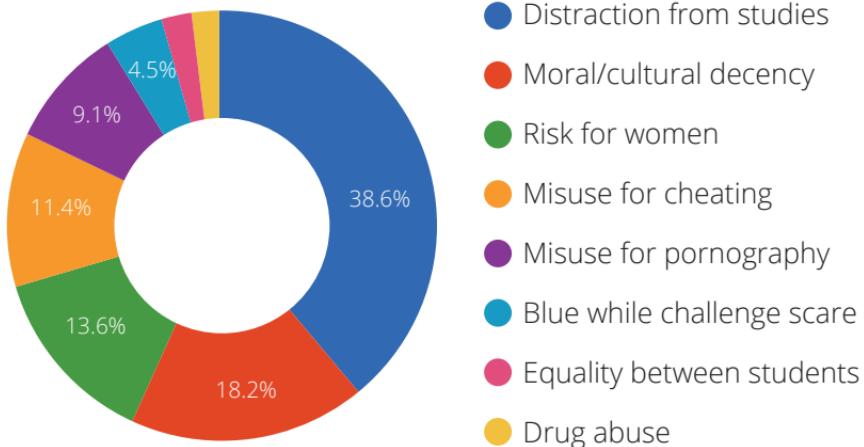


- Teacher (government schools) cell phone bans
- Student (government schools) cell phone bans
- Community (khan panchayat) cell phone bans

*Maps of known cell phone bans in Indian states. In red are community bans (i.e. khan panchayats), in green are bans on teachers in government schools and colleges and in blue are bans on students in government schools and colleges.*

The data for this visualization was collected from a thorough search of news and government reports. It was determined that out of 36 Indian states and union territories, 26 had state-level bans on students use of cell phones in schools. 20 states had bans on teachers, and 5 states had bans on use within certain communities or villages (e.g. khan panchayat bans). Our research did not go into depth on the topic of community cell phone bans in rural Northern India - more on these can be found in the extensive research of The Internet Democracy Project.<sup>15</sup> Instead, we focused on how cell phone bans in schools reveal government perceptions of the impact of cell phones on young people.

<sup>15</sup> Anja Kovacs, "Chupke, Chupke": Going Behind the Mobile Phone Bans in North India," The Internet Democracy Project, February 1, 2017, <https://genderingsurveillance.internetdemocracy.in/intro/>



*This chart illustrates an analysis of the various reasons given for school bans of cell phones in government and news reports (note that for each state ban, more than one reason was sometimes given.)*

While the most common reasoning cited for banning cell phones in schools was their potential to distract students and teachers from focusing on studies, this was often coupled with objections about phone endangering moral decency and creating risk for female students. Therefore, it is clear that an underlying sense of protectionism and fear of losing control over the sexuality of young women informs the widespread bans on cell phones in schools.

## Cell Phone Bans – to safeguard girls!

*"We have found during our interactions that mobile is the reason behind kidnap and rape among school and college going girls... When I did go through two or three rape cases of minor girls, what they told me was that they had got a missed call and out of curiosity they wanted to find out about it and it started from there...As we found several such incidents, we in the committee decided to recommend a ban on mobiles; ...it is not necessary for students, so we have mentioned that it should be banned."*

*Shakuntala Shetty, Head of Karnataka Legislature's Committee on Women and Child Welfare, The Hindu (July 12, 2014)<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> "Ban mobile phones in schools, colleges: Legislature panel," The Hindu, July 12, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/ban-mobile-phones-in-schools-colleges-legislature-panel/article6204065.ece>

*"Out of sight, out of touch, parents are often anxious about their daughters staying in distant hostels. Mobile phones, that now ubiquitous mode of communication, would have clearly kept them in touch, whenever, wherever."*

*Rasheed Kappan, op-ed writer, Deccan Herald (April 5, 2015)*<sup>17</sup>

The Karnataka ban mirrors the same paternalistic perception of a dangerous internet that informs technology addiction treatments, parental surveillance, and government regulation of internet use. But it is exceptional because it is backed by the state's power to completely end cell phone usage for all those who attend and live on college campuses. Even the call for safety apps to let parents track children stems from a deep-seated moral panic over the corruption of youth, young women specifically, which creates the need to exert control over young people's access to technology

## Cyberbullying

*"Instances of children committing suicide while (trying) Blue Whale challenge (sic) have been reported in India... You [internet companies] are hereby requested to ensure that any such link of this deadly game in its own name or similar game is immediately removed from your platform."*

*Statement of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (September 1, 2017)*<sup>18</sup>

*"We hardly receive complaints of kids being victims or perpetrators [of cyber-bullying]. In the last two years, three cases have been registered."*

*Anyesh Roy, DCP, Cyber Crime New Delhi*<sup>19</sup>

*"[Some batchmates] morphed my face on top of a plump, hairy woman's body, and the comments under it were very mean."*

*Pakhi, 13-year-old girl, New Delhi*<sup>20</sup>

Fears around cyberbullying and shocking - though ultimately rare - self-harm games lead to statements like that from the Indian gov-

<sup>17</sup> Rasheed Kappan, "The dangerous mobile ban," *The Deccan Herald*, April 5, 2015, <http://www.deccan-herald.com/content/469821/dangerous-mobile-ban.html>

<sup>18</sup> Sonya Lakhani, "Sarahah to Blue Whale: Delhi teens grapple with fears online," *The Indian Express*, September 1, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/sarahah-to-blue-whale-delhi-teens-grapple-with-fears-online-4801921/>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

ernment. Yet cybercrime units report almost no cases of cyberbullying. Likely, this is because the most common type of cyberbullying is not severe enough to involve the police. The panic that online access has created a new, more severe type of bullying for teens does not hold up to the evidence from the teens themselves.

### Managing Risk & Harassment

*"This one time, I clicked something on Facebook and my number went up by mistake. A friend of mine called me and told me to take it down."*

Sachi, 15-year-old girl, Pune<sup>21</sup>

*"This guy in our building messaged me on Facebook once saying, 'Hi sweetheart, you look very pretty in that dress.' I just blocked him straight away."*

Khursheed, 15-year-old girl, Pune<sup>22</sup>

Young girls and women are accepting of the inevitability of inappropriate and unwanted male attention online. Blocking unwanted solicitors and constantly watching out for friends are necessary safety precautions that young girls quickly learn. Meanwhile, the moral code that prescribes the activities young girls women must do and not do to be 'good girls' remains in place online. Of course, both on and offline, regardless of the steps that women and girls take to be 'good', they cannot escape those that want to do harm.

### Friendships & Identity Online

*"[Maria's] Instagram moniker is Tara, a name that she has always liked and wishes she could use in everyday life. 'Maria prefers gaming and Tara is into beauty and makeup stuff,' She's not self-conscious at all about this dual identity, whereas girls who have been on social media longer are quick to condemn the odd friend who presents an unrecognisable version of themselves online."*

*"Look,' demands Sachi, waving her phone at me. 'Look at the lame things Kavita sends us.' Indeed Kavita has sent out a message to a bunch of classmates asking them to pick her best characteristics from a given list. 'I just reply saying "all" and then she replies saying, "aaaaw".' They laugh. Replying to a forward, no matter how silly, is a testament to love and friendship."*

Sheena D'Lima, Deep Dives (July 15, 2015)<sup>23</sup>

21 Sheena D'Lima, "What schoolgirls in India can teach us about social media," Deep Dives, July 15, 2015, <https://deepdives.in/what-schoolgirls-in-india-can-teach-us-about-social-media-9d9e61c45f55>

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

The plethora of interest groups and activities available online - from widely popular to very niche - make it the perfect place for young people just beginning to explore their individuality to meet like-minded friends.

Sheena D'Lima's interviews with a group of upper-middle-class teenage girls in Pune shows that, rather than meeting strangers, most of teens' social internet use revolves around maintaining and reaffirming real-life friendships.

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## Emerging Counter-Narrative: Technology as a Force for Good

### Surveillance for Safety

"Last month, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that all government schools in the city would be fitted with CCTV cameras for round-the-clock surveillance of students. Parents could at any time check in on their children via a phone app that would offer them a real-time view of the classroom."

Times of India (February 17, 2018)<sup>24</sup>

"All feature phones will have the facility of panic button configured to the numeric key 5 or 9 and all smartphones [sic] will have the panic button configured to three times short pressing of the on-off button. Further, w.e.f. 1.1.2018, all mobile phones will be required to have the facility of identifying the location through satellite based GPS.

Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development (April 26, 2016)<sup>25</sup>

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24 Mohua Das, "Big Momma's Watching." Times of India, 17th February 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/big-mommas-watching/articleshow/62963162.cms>

25 'Panic Button and Global Positioning System in Mobile Phone Handsets Rules 2016,' Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Women and Child Development, 26 April 2016, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=142272>

Whether it is smartphone-enabled school livestreams or GPS-tracking panic buttons, protectionism by parental and governmental authorities is pervasive in the lives of today's children and youth. But rather than answering safety concerns, a culture of surveillance threatens the young and old's basic rights to privacy and dignity. What use is a GPS panic button if the responsible authorities fail to respond? And what if it is instead used to track citizens' movements outside of legal procedures? What if school authorities misuse CCTV footage to observe vulnerable students?

### The Case for Phones in Schools

*[Technology can be used for] bridging gaps between theoretical concepts and practical application... allowing learning to be more engaging and student-centric... dealing with perils of social media and how to be an effective digital citizen."*

Husein Dohadwallaa, director of an international academy in Mumbai, DNA (September 5, 2017)<sup>26</sup>

Standing in sharp contrast to moral-panic-induced calls for bans, surveillance, and other forms of paternalistic protectionism, this is an approach that treats adolescents as rational beings who can make good choices when given the right tools and training. As yet rare, this perspective is in favor of smartphone and technology integration in the classroom as a way to improve learning outcomes. More interesting still, it explicitly advocates for technology education as a method of managing risk online.

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<sup>26</sup> Husien Dohadwallaa, "Let's bring social media to Indian classrooms," DNA, September 5, 2017, <http://www.dnaindia.com/education/column-let-s-bring-social-media-to-indian-classrooms-2542963>.

## Conclusion: Media Narratives from a Bird's Eye View

### Moral Panic Wave

The availability of the cell phone, in conjunction with wifi and cheap data, means that the enormous, varied resources of the internet are now accessible at the click of a button, anytime, anywhere.

The vast ocean of content is not curated according to age and easily available to adolescents. This unfettered access is what seems to be triggering all the anxiety.

Further, mass media's curation of market research, medical studies, government policies, and hyperbolic public discourse all contributes to panic about the "threat" of Indian teens' smartphone use.

According to the media narratives, the "biggest threat" online is social media sites and the "most threatened" targets are young girls.

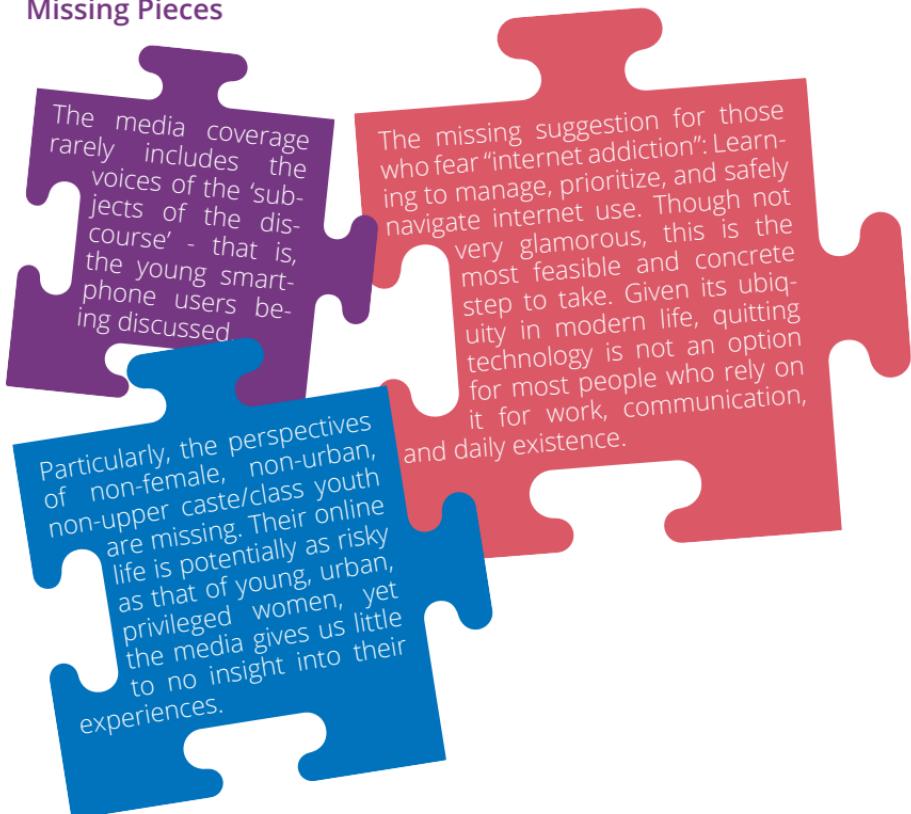
This fear and anxiety over the well-being, safety, and sexuality of young girls is identifiable as a moral panic because it is a cyclic phenomenon that recurs every time a new technology appears to threaten social hierarchy - whether it is the telegraph, telephone or internet.\*

\*See the literature review for a theoretical background on moral panic and its various manifestations across time.

### CYBER-PATRIARCHY

A close examination of the articles in newspapers, suggests a general concern and worry about the safety of adolescents and anxiety about the risk to adolescent girls. There is a strong mirroring of the perception of risks in the real and online world. Now, the dark street corner becomes an anonymous messaging app, catcallers become Twitter trolls, and strangers offering candy become Facebook friend requests from fake accounts. What hasn't changed, though, is a moral code that puts girls in their place and tries to control their activity. Ultimately, the same patriarchal power structure that limits a young woman's independent access to public space is transferred to her online activity.

## Missing Pieces



## Looking Ahead

Unseen in media reporting is the possibility for smartphones to provide space for crucial individual development for young people, as they form and strengthen friendships online and explore multiple emerging identities. Girls, particularly, may thrive online by venturing into virtual spaces with forbidden content, exploring their identity, and engaging in social "play" online in a way they are unable to in a tightly monitored, physically threatening reality. Media and news articles also gloss over the complexities and uncertainties of scientific studies on issues like addiction in favor of controversial, reaction-seeking headlines. Though it fell outside the parameters of this research, a Business Insider UK article,<sup>27</sup> "There's no solid evidence that people get addicted to social media — and using it could

<sup>27</sup> Erin Brodwin, "There's no solid evidence that people get addicted to social media — and using it could actually be beneficial," Business Insider UK, March 19, 2018, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/social-media-iphone-facebook-instagram-addiction-2018-3?r=US&IR=T>

actually be beneficial", includes studies that show teens are using digital communication to deepen and strengthen existing in-person relationships. The media seldom highlights these studies, which contradict the popular moral panic narrative.



**KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
DON'T PANIC  
ABOUT  
SMART PHONES**

Therefore, although it is challenging and potentially less profitable, media producers must begin using ethical, evidence-based reporting about this issue that does not falsely fan the flames of moral panic. In tandem, scientists and medical professionals must do their part to conduct unbiased studies with sound methodologies and properly communicate the findings to journalists and the general public. Scientists also have to be careful to prevent widespread moral panic from biasing how their own research is done and analyzed. See the 2017 UNICEF

evidence-focused literature review,<sup>28</sup> "How does the time children spend using digital technology impact their mental well-being, social relationships and physical activity?" for a thorough discussion of the actual scientific evidence of the impact of smartphone and internet use on children's well-being.

In the age of enormous cybersecurity breaches of personal, financial, and biometric data, debates about smartphones ruining youths' well-being distract us from the far more severe issues that are threatening our systems and societies. Therefore, discussions about young people's safety online must be careful to avoid the trap of succumbing to the anxieties that fuel moral panic scapegoating. In the greater interest of all 'netizens' - young and old - we must work towards creating online spaces that enhance safety and ease risk management rather than veering towards protectionism and restricting young people's access to the internet.

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28. Daniel Kardefelt-Winther, "How does the time children spend using digital technology impact their mental well-being, social relationships and physical activity?" UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, December 2017, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Children-digital-technology-wellbeing.pdf>

# CHAPTER 3

## ***SMARTPHONES ON THE GROUND***

### *KEY FINDINGS*



## Context of the Research

- With an increase in the age at marriage and an overall emphasis on girls' education, their rights and personal freedom, it is evident that there is also an increase in violence against women, moral anxiety about girls and young women exercising their life choices particularly around romantic relationships and the choice of marriage partners. (Singh 2016; Kovac 2017; Nayantara 2016; Kaur 2010; Cassell and Cramer 2008).
- Concerns around adherence to caste, class, religion, ethnicity and region are leading to greater controls by families and communities (Singh 2016; Nayantara 2016; Kovacs 2017; Kaur 2010).
- The Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Act, 2012, has increased the age at consent from 16 to 18 years in consonance with the age at marriage. However, this has lead to a scenario where even consensual sexual relationships among adolescents and young males and females below the age of 18 years are legally disallowed and hence criminalized. Young male lovers can be put in prison and tried under this Act and the revised Rape legislations.
- Schools are ill-equipped to deal with changing laws, reproductive rights and life skills education and counselling, that is required to provide a supportive environment for adolescents.
- Within this context the presence and role of the mobile phone are often alluded to as the cause for young girls and boys striking relationships, maintaining romantic relationships, eloping and bringing 'dishonour' (Kovacs 2017).

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However, this has lead to a scenario where even consensual sexual relationships among adolescents and young males and females below the age of 18 years are legally disallowed and hence criminalized.

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## Objectives of the Community based Exploratory Research

The objectives of this exploratory research were:

- To gain an understanding of the location of the mobile phone in the lives of adolescents, young girls and women
- The perspectives around the use and abuse of mobile phones among adolescents on the one hand, and adults on the other; and
- To identify areas that need greater and in-depth research to arrive at better ways of addressing the use of mobile phone.

### Adolescents in M Ward, Mumbai: Observations from the TISS Baseline Survey (2015)\*

#### Educational attainment:

83% of children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 17 attend school, however, only 23% of young people between the ages of 18 and 23 attend school. The rate of enrolment is lower for Muslim girls and boys. School enrolment rates in Baiganwadi and Govandi are the lowest in the whole M-Ward. The main issues associated with dropping out and lack of enrolment are the inability to spend on education, financial concerns, disinterest in education, the perception that government schools lack quality, and a lack of school facilities more generally. While girls drop out for these as well as domestic responsibility reasons, boys drop out for these reasons and to work to supplement the family income. Less than 4.5% of the total population of the ward had completed any graduate studies. Taking the whole population of the ward into account, the median year of schooling was 9 for men and 7 for women. Baiganwadi reported the lowest median years of schooling, at 7.

#### Livelihood:

Less than 50% of men and 20% of women between the ages of 20 to 55 are employed. Muslim women reflect highest rates of unemployment. In these areas, the informal sector is the main employment category across all groups, followed by self-employment. The main

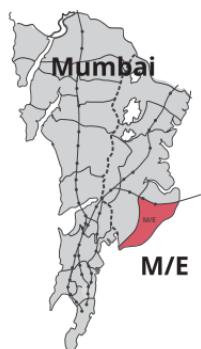
occupations in the ward are drivers, casual workers, tailors, shopkeepers, mechanics, salespersons, street vendors, etc.

### Women's health:

The average age of marriage across the ward is 18 for women, implying that many women get married before the age of 18 - this, in turn, indicates that they may not have completed their education or explored employment options, which would provide financial independence. Early marriage can also lead to early and unplanned pregnancies. On average, women in these areas bear 4 children each. Contraceptive use is extremely low among adolescent women: with only 8% of married adolescents aged 15 to 19 using any family planning method. It also falls on women to use contraceptives, as condom use is extremely low.

### Study Sites

- 7 sites from four settlements and 1 Municipal School site were chosen for the qualitative research in M East ward of Mumbai.



- M East Ward of Mumbai has the lowest Human Development Index among all 24 municipal wards in Mumbai.
- 85% of the ward's population lives in slums. People who live in the slums originate from various states of the country and belong to various religions, with Hindus being the dominant group.
- Several infrastructure development project-displaced families across Mumbai are relocated and rehabilitated in this ward.

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M East Ward of Mumbai has the lowest Human Development Index among all 24 municipal wards in Mumbai

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\* Social Economic Conditions and. Vulnerabilities. A Report of the Baseline Survey of M(East) Ward, Mumbai. Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai.

## Research Methodology

- The FGDs were with adolescent girls boys, young boys and girls; and SHG women.
- Interactions at the School were with 9th-grade girls who also did 5 Role plays around smartphones and everyday interactions with friends and peers in the community and with parents at home
- FGDs with boys and young men

## Location of the Study

The study was carried out in habitations across three localities in M East Ward of Mumbai, between November and December 2017.

### Study Location descriptions

#### Shahiji Nagar:

Many families from this location have been relocated to slum rehabilitation buildings. The families left behind are waiting for their rehabilitation. Most of the people staying here are Scheduled Castes and Neo-Buddhists. Men work in the Municipal Corporation or Bombay Electric Supply & Tramway Company Limited" (B.E.S.T) and some of them are also casual workers. The women are housewives or work as domestic workers in the neighboring apartment complexes. The women participate in self-help groups and chit fund groups. All children go to Marathi medium school.

#### Jai Hind Nagar:

This habitation is close to two Petroleum companies and most of the homes are adjacent to the railway tracks. Many men work in these petroleum companies as casual or contract workers. Men work as drivers. Men and women also carry out skilled zari work in some homestead workshops. Most of the children study till 10th standard. There are several out of school youth who gamble and drink.

#### Shivaji Nagar, Bainganwadi

This location has several families that are from UP and Bihar. Muslims are more in number here. There is a dumping ground beside

therefore the basic facilities are poor. Like, there are no drains. There is an issue of electricity, toilet facilities and garbage collection. There is a Sanjay Nagar Municipal school, that too on the other side of the road. Everyone has to go to Shivaji Nagar area for schooling and colleges. Here, after 10th standard girls do not get educated further. There are several people with no literacy, high dropout rate for boys and girls. The people staying here do different types of work like, some engage in chappal making, working in bag-making workshops, and some work in catering. Many of them work as tailors, welders, carpenters, rickshaw drivers, garbage collection, zari-workers etc.

### P L Lokhande Marg

This habitation is adjacent to P L Lokhande Marg. Most of the homes are pucca and families have access to water, electricity, toilets, paved pathways, schools and colleges. Many men from this locality are in the lower end of the service sector jobs with regular jobs. The women work as domestic workers or undertake income-earning work from home or are full-time housewives. Many young men and women in this habitation are well educated, some of them have jobs and many of them are unemployed.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Phone: Aspirational possession

While ownership of smartphones is rare among school going girls, they access smartphones belonging to their mothers, sisters or fathers. Gratification of having a personal phone is linked to performance in 10th exams for boys and girls. Few school going girls and boys get phones handed down when another family member purchases a smartphone, but they are circumspect about it since most schools do not allow cell phone use in the school.

Most girls are aware of a variety of features and they are also expected to be aware as part of the peer culture. Taking, posting and sharing pictures and playing games on the phone is most common among adolescent girls. Many of them use WhatsApp account of a mother or family member to be in touch with their girl classmates to solve maths and complete homework.

Adolescent girls rarely have Facebook (FB) accounts, since they do not have several personal identifiers like cell phone and their own email id. However, during the course of the study it has been observed that if any one family member has an FB account, many other members also use the account and upload pictures and operate the account.

Whatsapp is the most extensively used app across age groups for messaging, sharing of photographs and sending forwards to each other. At one of the sites of the study, one out of school young girl working in garment factory said "*Facebook is for older people. I am on Instagram. All celebrities are on Instagram. We can follow up.*"

These findings match existing research indicating that mobile phones are used for a variety of functions (Nurullah 2009), and that poorer families tend to use a variety of strategies such as sharing, hand-me-downs, etc. with respect to their mobile phone use, as not every family member is allowed or can afford their own phone - and women and girls face additional barriers to using them (Tehnunen 2008; Potnis 2016).

## Phone an add-on to display of upward mobility

While phones are often associated with communication, being in touch, gathering information, fun space, a personalized TV, 'hangout' space, 'the public' within the private; it is interestingly an important addition to many other items of display of consumption, upward mobility and modernity – salwar kameez among women; jeans pant, T-Shirt, ponytail, sandals and backpack among girls.

Research confirms that mobile phones now reflect a social aspiration quality among adolescents and families alike (Rangaswamy and Cuttrell 2011; Donner et al).

### Gender and Age differentials in access to phones

*Dabba* phones and smartphones: Non-touch screen phones, which have features of making calls and receiving text messages are often referred to as "Dabba phones" or "button phones". The term Dabba means an empty container, something which is of no substance.

Among the older women, one woman mentioned:

*"I don't have a smartphone but my husband has a smartphone even though he is also not literate. He still uses it somehow or the other"*

One woman whose daughter works in a mall as a sales girl said –

*"my husband isn't literate but my girl is. She explains it to us. Once she does something we do it accordingly".*

While boys are likely to get new smartphones, girls and women are often handed down an old phone when one of the other members of the family purchases a new phone.

Girls who drop out from school and take up work in garment factories or with community based NGOs, purchase new smartphones. They are networked through WhatsApp and sport the phone as an extension of their clothing and identity.

Younger girls and boys have a greater understanding of the phones, features and possibilities more than that of their parents.

## Shifts in Power balance and Gender Control

Linked to the poor knowledge of phones among parents there is a general anxiety about the use of phones by children for watching videos, cartoons, playing games and listening to music. The anxieties are about poor performance in education.

There is a general perception that many young girls and boys are not in parental control because of the differential access to information and the ability of young people to be connected with significant 'others' that the parents have no way of figuring out. Research suggests that the more parents operate with control and dominance, the more adolescents will find ways to subvert these strategies and continue to carry out relationships in secret - in the process, spaces for honest and open communication continue to be closed off (Weir 2006; Pain et al 2005).

One senior SHG women President referring to young girls and boys said:

*"They don't have any time to speak to anyone. If you see them anytime, in the bus or in the train, they are always on the mobile. They try to catch the trains or buses and they even fall at times, they have accidents. If while riding the bike they put earphones in the ears then many times they have accidents. This has happened in our area".*

One woman said:

*"They lie to us. They tell us that they are doing something related to college or studies, like consulting about notes. But in reality, something else is going on. There have been a lot of fights in the house due to phones only..."*

In the process, the baton of controlling girls has moved to brothers (older and sometimes younger as well). Families and especially brothers keep tabs on girls using phones. Within families, boys are given phones earlier than girls. While there is less surveillance on boys and their use of phones, girls are subjected to greater surveillance and control, especially by their brothers.

Smita, an adolescent girl said:

*"This is because the boy's phone is his own. If the parents touch the phone he says please don't touch my phone. It is also locked with a code. It's not the same for a girl. We are asked why is there a code? Open the code. What are you doing till this late in the night?"*

A lot of tension between siblings revolves around the smartphones and brothers attempts to 'safeguard' sisters and girls are concern that they are not taken seriously. Many girls too highlighted issues of safety, parental right to check and exercise control since they know more than them.

This is in tune with current research showing that within the home, women are subject to more limitations on their phone use compared to men and boys (Donner et al; Kovacs 2017).

### **Girls may go 'out of control'**

Lack of understanding of how to understand the phone, its architecture, calls, messages, is leaving parents to feel the loss of control. But some of the parents also have a sense of pride that their children know the ways of the world.

While parents feel heightened fear owing to their relative digital illiteracy, at the same time children are becoming the technological innovators in the home and make key financial and strategic decisions around the mobile phone within the family (Donner et al 2008).

With reference to girls, there are concerns about delayed marriages, increasing education, access to information on the phones and a high threat of girls 'going out of control' if given smartphones. This mirrors Donner et al's study showing that some Indian women reject the mobile phone within the family because they equate modesty with the private sphere (and the phone represents the public sphere) - and by rejecting the mobile phone they feel that they are maintaining the domestic fabric and conforming to expectations of appropriate womanly behaviour (Donner et al 2008).

Women in a community meeting mentioned:

*"In the past, the world was a different place. Now it's different. We definitely have become suspicious. First people used to say 'Maa' to the mother; it had closeness to it. Now they say 'Mummy'.*

*"During earlier times, when a girl had her periods, parents immediately used to marry her off. They used to stop sending her outside. They used to keep her at home only. So the only dream the girl had in her mind was of marriage.*

*Further, in the past, only after marriage would we come to know about certain things. But now as they see everything on the phone, their minds are impatient. This is all due to the phone".*

*Another mother said - "There is one thing that happens quite a bit. A male and female are contacting each other on the phone. Then the relationship increases. Then the girl and boy run away. Not in this house but it happens in the community but not in our area".*

### **Active Girls and Passive Boys**

Across the sites where we studied including the interviews and role plays in schools, we had found that girls were more articulate, active and ready to participate and 'grab' all opportunities of interaction and learning. Compared to girls, boys came across hesitant, reluctant to talk and lacked confidence <sup>31</sup>. During the interviews at the school, one boy said, "there is a lot of tension that I have with phones. I do not know how to deal with it. I cannot confront my friends nor explain at home the peer pressure I face".

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<sup>31</sup> We are unsure if this is purely coincidental or a methodological fall out since the research team was all women and the sites of the study were either in homes or in school premises (with no school authorities present).

This student refused to speak beyond this. Our FGDs at the community level revealed the pressures that adolescent and young boys face in the communities where they live. Boys with older sisters are bullied by young men referred to as 'tapories' to socialize with them, to watch porn or for parting with phone numbers of their sisters.

One mother said – *"Girls are in a different zone, they have a different energy these days. They have become smarter. But boys aren't like this. They are into addictive substances. Here there is an alcohol shop...even weed is sold here. Kids are consuming it and getting addicted".*

### Smartphone the new Public Space

During the discussions and role plays in the school setting, we had attempted to understand why is it boys spoke so little about phones and the girls had a lot of excitement about smartphones. We have observed that school going adolescent boys, play on their school ground after school, find spaces where they can play cricket or simply hang out with friends after school, however, girls have several restrictions. They are expected to go to school and return home. Once they return from school there are restrictions on their mobility. Girls do homework, watch TV, play games on their mother's or sister's phone, chat with friends on WhatsApp, share school homework, take pictures, exchange them and so on. They are busy on WhatsApp till late into the night. Smartphones provide the virtual public space for girls to hang out in the absence of access to public spaces. While girls are excited parents are anxious.

One mother said:

*"They keep clicking on the phone...we are scared with this knowledge. If any kind of photo is clicked and uploaded online then what will happen? What if something wrong happens? That guy might encourage her to run away with him or he shall blackmail her. Even he marries her after they both run away; still, there is no guarantee that he will take good care of her. Guys are not adequately educated and are also unemployed right now. His parents take care of him, so how will he earn enough for the girl?"*

## Smartphones to keep Adolescent Boys out of Harm's Way

It has been noticed that, while girls are not given phones to keep them away from harm's way boys are given phones to keep them away from harm's way. Parents with precarious jobs and out of home most of the time, have concerns about their children. In the case of girls they are worried about their safety and sexuality and in the case of boys they are worried about their future and concerns about going wayward – 'taporí'.

Families meet the demand of their out of school young boys for smartphones. Cheap smartphones are purchased in monthly installments and given to young boys. There is a concern that these boys will go out of hand if families do not meet the demand for a phone. Most of the habitations are adjacent to railway tracks. Mothers in the FGDs mentioned that boys threaten to commit suicide, run away from home and get into bad company. The smartphone is lesser of an evil and addiction compared to drugs, getting into petty crimes and alcoholism. With smartphones most young boys are busy watching cricket, movies, exchanging music, photos and so on.

Mother in the FGDs mentioned that boys threaten to commit suicide, run away from home and get into bad company. The smartphone is lesser of an evil and addiction compared to drugs, getting into petty crimes and alcoholism.

## Limitations in the present & future possibilities

This study has been limited to low-income neighbourhoods. One group of boys and girls are Muslims but we could not explore the role of religion and be a religious minority in the lives of girls and boys. The study did not focus on adolescent girls and boys with disabilities. This is an area to explore.

Representation from middle and upper-class girls, boys and parents is missing in this study. Methodologically there have been limitations in our engagement with boys – since the research team was all women.

## Directions for Further Research

- What are adolescents' own experiences and feelings about the role of the mobile phone in accessing social mobility, health information, education, employment and skills? (mediated by gender and class)
- In what ways can the mobile phone be a way for girls to sidestep physical mobility constraints through the virtual world?
- How is participatory surveillance enacted in practice to ensure peer safety among adolescents?
- What are the strategies employed by adolescent girls to sidestep moral panic, avoid barriers to access and use, and ensure safety?
- Comparative analysis of protectionist VS educative approaches towards adolescents and smartphones
- What methodologies will work best with young men?

## Future Directions

Through the field study, it has been observed that human rights provisions that obligate Governments to 'respect, protect and fulfill' rights of young people are getting undermined.

There is a need to study various initiatives with girls and boys by various NGOs and identify areas for intervention on using phones and internet in an empowering manner.

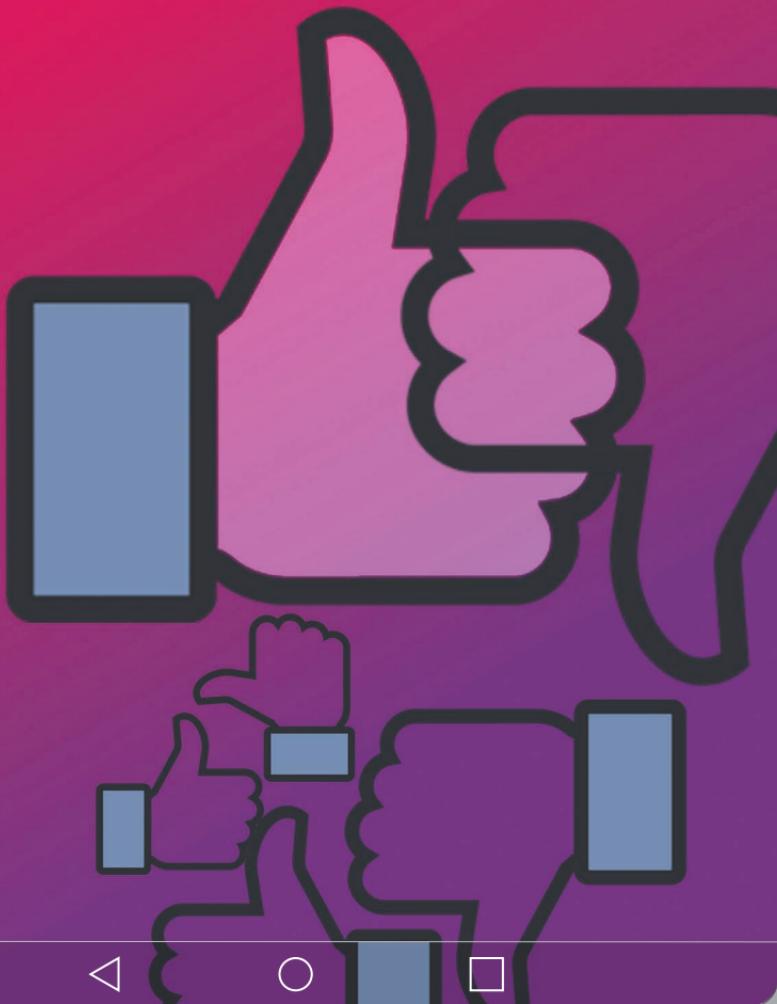
There is a need to develop Life Skills Education in the realms of awareness of the law, safe sex and gender relations and health.

Focus on strengthening research in this area will address SDGs and renewed Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health.

This is crucial to ensure that adolescents not only survive but also thrive and transform their communities.

# CHAPTER 4

## ***CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS***



The mobile phone is a revolutionary artefact of our times: it represents a great potential for reshaping social relations and enhancing personal growth. This is especially true for youth and adolescents, who are the fastest-growing consumers of mobile technology in India.

Our project sought to map the ground realities and track current trends in the field of adolescents and mobile phones, with a focus on rights, gender, sexuality and family. Through a media analysis, literature review and exploratory field study, we sought to understand the experiences of adolescents in navigating the dynamic and ever-changing digital landscape through their relationships with and use of mobile phones - and explore what this means for them in their personal lives.

Our print and online media analysis indicated that media coverage reflects anxiety over smartphone use, possibly triggered by unfettered access to a vast ocean of uncurated content available on the Internet and enabled by smartphones. Further, mass media's curation of market research, medical studies, government policies, and hyperbolic public discourse all contributes to panic about the threat of Indian teens' smartphone use. According to the media narratives, the biggest threat online is social media sites and the most threatened targets are young girls. This fear and anxiety over the well-being, safety, and sexuality of young girls is identifiable as a moral panic because it is a cyclic phenomenon that recurs every time the social hierarchy is threatened by the appearance of a new technology – whether it is the telegraph, telephone or internet. In fact, we see the same patriarchal moral code that controls young women's independent access to public space now transferred to her online activity.

Equally as significant as the narratives highlighted by the media are the positive stories that are missing altogether. Unseen in media reporting is the possibility for smartphones to provide space for crucial individual development for young people, as they form and strengthen friendships online and explore multiple emerging identities. Girls, particularly, may thrive online by venturing into virtual spaces with forbidden content, exploring their identity, and engaging in social "play" online in a way they are unable to in a tightly monitored, physically threatening reality. Media and news articles also

gloss over the complexities and uncertainties of scientific studies on issues like "addiction" in favour of controversial, reaction-seeking headlines. Though it fell outside the parameters of this research, a Business Insider UK article titled - "There's no solid evidence that people get addicted to social media — and using it could actually be beneficial"<sup>32</sup>, includes studies that show teens are using digital communication to deepen and strengthen existing in-person relationships. The media seldom highlight these studies, which contradict the popular moral panic narrative.

Therefore, although it is challenging and potentially less profitable, media producers must begin using ethical, evidence-based reporting about this issue that does not falsely fan the flames of moral panic. In tandem, scientists and medical professionals must do their part to conduct unbiased studies with sound methodologies and properly communicate the findings to journalists and the general public. Scientists also have to be careful to prevent widespread moral panic from biasing how their own research is done and analyzed. For a thorough discussion of the actual scientific evidence of the impact of smartphone and internet use on children's well-being the 2017 UNICEF evidence-focused literature review titled - "How does the time children spend using digital technology impact their mental well-being, social relationships and physical activity?"<sup>33</sup> will be of use.

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<sup>32</sup> Erin Brodwin, "There's no solid evidence that people get addicted to social media — and using it could actually be beneficial," Business Insider UK, March 19, 2018, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/social-media-iphone-facebook-instagram-addiction-2018-3?r=US&IR=T>

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Kardefelt-Winther, "How does the time children spend using digital technology impact their mental well-being, social relationships and physical activity?" UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, December 2017, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Children-digital-technology-wellbeing.pdf>

In the age of enormous cybersecurity breaches of personal, financial, and biometric data, debates about smartphones ruining youths' well-being distract us from the far more severe issues that are threatening our systems and societies. Therefore, discussions about young people's safety online must be careful to avoid the trap of succumbing to the anxieties that fuel moral panic scapegoating. In the greater interest of all netizens - young and old - we must work towards creating online spaces that enhance safety and ease risk management rather than veering towards protectionism and restricting young people's access to the internet. For that to happen, scientists, media professionals, and media consumers must all conscientiously work against moral panic frameworks and towards foregrounding the rights of adolescents by creating a supportive environment for their growth based on sound, ethical science and reporting.

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The literature review and analysis confirmed and built upon the findings of the media analysis. It found that there are growing tensions between adolescents on one hand, and families, schools and communities on the other - centred around perceived adverse effects of mobile phones on adolescents, which tend to also be rooted in the moral panic.

One of the main findings is that there are gaps in the dominant narratives about mobile phones - narratives that are built and acted upon by researchers, journalists, parents and community leaders. These narratives tend to either perpetuate or be influenced by a sense of moral panic over mobile phone use by adolescents in general and adolescent girls in particular, who bear the brunt of this

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panic. An interesting finding was that moral panic over women and girls' use of new communication technology is not new, in fact, but age-old. Thus, anxieties over girls' use of mobile phones fall into age-old patterns, based on fear of women gaining control over their bodies and sexual agency.

Meanwhile, little work explores or builds on what adolescents' themselves experience and have to say. While the adverse effects of mobile phones are not limited to adolescents, yet sensationalized reporting clouds the fact that adolescents are not known to exhibit magnified vulnerability to these adverse effects compared to adults. Moreover, it ignores the fact that adolescents have their own risk management strategies and may, in fact, be employing mobile phones for information gathering, employment generation or health-seeking purposes.

Within the current research and media atmosphere, it becomes difficult to disentangle the fact that mobile phones are not directly causing new problems, but are a mirror or a medium reflecting existing risks to adolescents, reflected in the virtual world. However in the current context, rather than looking into the concrete risks experienced by adolescents, the focus has shifted to mobile phones as a site of victimization, risk and perceived danger. This is counterproductive as mobile phones are here to stay, and moral panic only serves to deepen gender gaps at a time when digital literacy is becoming an indispensable skill to succeed in the real world.

## Key UN Mandates

In the last decade, there has been an increasing global recognition of the importance of safeguarding adolescents' rights and of developing an enabling environment for adolescent growth and development. Some of the notable mandates released by UN on this topic in recent years have begun to address the rights of adolescents to access, use and keep themselves safe in online spaces and digital media. Key mandates include:

### **1. On rights and enabling environment:**

UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 4 (2003) on Adolescent Health and Development<sup>34</sup>

"They (parents) have an obligation to take into account the adolescents' views, in accordance with their age and maturity, and to provide a safe and supportive environment in which the adolescent can develop. Adolescents need to be recognized by the members of their family environment as active rights holders who have the capacity to become full and responsible citizens, given the proper guidance and direction". (Clarification in italics added)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has the following observations as cited in the General comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence document<sup>35</sup>.

### **2. On combating harmful gender norms on boys and girls:**

"States need to invest in proactive measures to promote the empowerment of girls, challenge patriarchal and other harmful gender norms and stereotyping and legal reforms in order to address direct and indirect discrimination against girls, in cooperation with all stakeholders, including civil society, women and men, traditional and religious leaders and adolescents' themselves. Explicit measures are needed in all laws, policies and programmes to guarantee the rights of girls on an equal basis with boys. ... The Committee urges States to introduce measures to address such rights violations and encour-

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34 [https://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/general\\_comments/GC4\\_en.doc.html](https://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/general_comments/GC4_en.doc.html)

35 [http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2016\\_General\\_Comment\\_20\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2016_General_Comment_20_Eng.pdf)

ages them to challenge negative perceptions of boys, promote positive masculinities, overcome cultural values based on machismo and promote greater recognition of the gender dimension of the abuses they experience. States should also recognize the importance of engaging with boys and men, as well as girls and women, in all measures introduced to achieve gender equality" (p 9).

### **3. On access to digital media:**

"States should adopt measures to ensure that all adolescents have access, without discrimination, to different forms of media and support and promote equal access to digital citizenship, including through the promotion of accessible formats for adolescents with disabilities. Training and support should be provided as part of the basic education curriculum to ensure the development of adolescents' digital, information and media and social literacy skills". (p. 13)

### **4. On right to safe and unrestricted use of digital media:**

"The digital environment can also expose adolescents to risks. This should not, however, restrict adolescents' access to the digital environment. ... Instead, their safety should be promoted through holistic strategies, including digital literacy with regard to online risks and strategies for keeping them safe, strengthened legislation and law enforcement mechanisms to tackle abuse online and fight impunity, and training parents and professionals who work with children. ... States are urged to ensure the active engagement of adolescents in the design and implementation of initiatives aimed at fostering online safety, including through peer mentoring." (p.13)

### **5. On the need for adult awareness about adolescent rights:**

"Adults' understanding and awareness of adolescents' right to participation is important for adolescents' enjoyment of that right, and it encourages States to invest in training and awareness-raising, particularly for parents and caregivers, professionals working with and for adolescents, policymakers and decision makers. Support is needed to enable adults to become mentors and facilitators so that adolescents can take greater responsibility for their own lives and the lives of those around them" (p.13).

## Recommendations:

As observed in this exploratory study, the stated UN goals as elaborated in the earlier section, are barely respected, recognized and adopted. We have looked at adolescents and mobile phones through the landscape of rights, sexuality, empowerment, risk and control, in the context of family and society. Our findings from the primary study, which emerges from an exclusive focus on low-income children and neighbourhoods, show that there are multiple contradictions explosively operating in the same space. These observations need a further in-depth study with a broader sample of adolescents from all the other strata of society. However, the review of literature and the print media analysis, indirectly cover the middle and higher income group adolescent and young people.

Based on the present research, we can identify three issues in particular connected to the UN mandates pertaining to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and provide recommendations for future work in this sector:

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Our findings from the primary study, which emerges from an exclusive focus on low-income children and neighbourhoods, show that there are multiple contradictions explosively operating in the same space.

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### 1. Need to Prioritize Freedom Vs Enforcing Control:

Mobile phones represent freedom and possibility to adolescents; at the same time they represent a loss of control by the parents and bring in concern about children's future. These concerns heighten when the knowledge of mobile technology and the Internet resources is inadequate. Adolescent girls seem to tacitly accept some level of parental control as necessary or desirable, while boys seem to intensely guard their privacy with regard to using mobile phones. There is little open communication within the family about the risks of using mobile phones, limits of parental control, boundaries of adolescent privacy, or safety strategies while accessing digital media.

## **2. Foster Identity building for Girls and Boys Vs rigid gender roles:**

Adolescent girls and boys do not have any spaces where they can build personal ideas and identities for themselves. These opportunities are actively discouraged in the case of girls in two main areas they are confined to, the home and the school. Yet girls are pushing to expand and create these spaces both in the public and private sphere, with great energy, bolstered by increasing public messaging aimed at empowering girls. Meanwhile, adolescent boys assert control in the private sphere (including on their sisters), but find themselves at a loss in the public sphere, where the pressure to exhibit machismo and toxic masculine behaviour prevails and there is little public messaging aimed at positive and productive masculinities.

## **3. Need to Foster an Enabling environment Vs forcing vulnerability:**

Discourses emerging from families, schools, media and society centre on protecting girls from the risks of mobile phone technology. However this is rooted in a moral panic based on the need to control girls' sexuality, and though it takes on a benevolent tone, ends up compromising girls' safety by reducing their opportunities in the long term and leaving them more vulnerable. Meanwhile, an inverse logic is applied to boys' use of mobile technology: if they are spending more time on their phones, it leaves less time for undesirable activities, such as loitering, consuming drugs, harassing girls, etc. Parents feel reassured when adolescent boys use mobile phones, and panic when adolescent girls do the same. There is a need to engage with boys and girls to access the empowering potential of digital technologies and counter the forces of gender-stereotyped funnelling of access to education, training, information, knowledge that create barriers to the exercise of choices and freedom.

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## In Conclusion:

Parental anxiety about girls and their freedoms need to be placed within a context of increasing incidence of sexual violence; media hyped toxic masculinity amidst rising unemployment, growing lumpenisation, communal tensions and culture of violence. Initiatives with adolescents by NGOs within the city of Mumbai are few and far between. There is an urgent need to consolidate the learnings of various initiatives, evaluate what is working and advocate for going to scale for greater integration of gender sensitivity, positive disposition to technologies within curriculum and in schools and colleges.

The three areas mentioned in the recommendations section represent possible directions for future research, action and public policy work, aimed at narrowing the deep gaps between global goals pertaining to adolescent rights, and the ground reality that adolescents find themselves in. With increasing attention being paid to adolescent rights on the one hand and the empowering possibilities offered by digital media and mobile phones on the other, it becomes crucial to explore this landscape in order to contribute to an enabling environment for adolescent growth, health, and needs, and to inform efforts at the community level and schools in order to aim to empower adolescents to thrive as individuals, citizens and leaders. Adolescent and young boys along with girls and parents need to be reached out to work on fostering gender-sensitive and violence-free neighbourhoods for all.

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There is an urgent need to consolidate the learnings of various initiatives, evaluate what is working and advocate for going to scale for greater integration of gender sensitivity, positive disposition to technologies within curriculum and in schools and colleges.

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