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# Media For the Masses the Usage Patterns and Social Consequences of a Mobile-Phone Based Citizen Journalism Platform in Madhya-Pradesh

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MEDIA FOR THE MASSES: THE USAGE PATTERNS AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

OF A MOBILE-PHONE BASED CITIZEN JOURNALISM PLATFORM IN MADHYA

PRADESH

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*Abstract*

*In a country as diverse and hierarchical as India, certain marginalized populations are bound to be excluded from the mainstream media. In particular, the adivasi and lower caste populations in rural regions receive either no representation or biased coverage. CGNet Swara, a citizen journalism initiative, seeks to remedy these disparities by utilizing cellphone technology to report and distribute news in the Central Gondwana region. Each citizen with a cellphone in his or her hand, regardless of religion, caste, age or literacy level, can disseminate information he or she sees as valuable by leaving a voice recording at a certain number. Each citizen can also receive pertinent news, free of charge, by calling and listening to the postings. This program is proven to promote demonstrable political change, but the effect on communities has yet to be determined. Through both qualitative and quantitative methods, I investigated the usage patterns and social consequences in one specific village that uses CGNet Swara through a survey, interviews, and focus groups. In doing so, I discovered that citizens' primary motivation for using CGNet was to engage government officials and create tangible solutions. The program impacted the village by making the community stronger and more trusting, as well as empowering women. As a whole, participatory media in rural communities can give citizens more agency and control over their lives.*

*I. Background*

India has one of the most thriving print newspaper markets in the world, and has rapidly expanding radio and television options (Mudlier, Donner, Thies 2013). However, quantity of media options does not ensure quality of reporting. In a country as large and diverse as India, certain marginalized groups are excluded from the mainstream media's discourse. The mainstream print media – newspapers with the highest circulation, often in Hindi or English – fails to cover adivasi and Dalit issues in depth. Even when newspapers report violence against Dalits, they misrepresents the issues and report them in a way that masks the reality – that they are human rights violations – and prevents the reader from feeling sympathy for the victims. The lack of Dalits and adivasis on news desks across the country is a prominent cause of this bias. A study by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi showed that "90% of decision makers in the English language print media…were from the 'upper castes'" (Balasubramaniam 2011). Dalit and adivasi reporters are few and far between, even in the central India region where much of the tribal population is situated. During two recent ongoing conflicts in the state of Chhattisgarh, a state with a primarily adivasi population, the *Times of India* did not have a single journalist stationed in the state, despite have the largest network of correspondents throughout India (Sharma 2012).

Clearly, India's reportage is lacking. The most recent World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders ranks India 140th out of 180 countries for right to information, reportage of conflict, and safety of journalists ("2014 press freedom index" 2014). Freedom House gives their own rating of 39 on a scale of 1 to 100, 0 being the best. One factor contributing to this ranking is editorial content, which, in Freedom House's review of Indian media, is strongly biased ("India" 2014). The mainstream media is not distributing just and

equitable information. Alternative media, on the other hand, provides a platform that intentionally gives a voice to the "other" in society and often experiment with how content is produced and distributed (Atton 2002). Accessible alternative media is a viable antidote to the mainstream media's shortcomings.

CGNet Swara is a mobile phone–based alternative media platform that attempts to rectify these problems in the central Gondwana region of India. In 2004, Shubhranshu Choudhary returned to his home village in India to launch an initiative that would connect the rural population with and inform them about each other and the government. The program works vice versa as well, with the government accessing vital information about the communities' needs. CGNet Swara enables callers to report or receive news by pressing either one or two, respectively. The service remains free for callers because they call the phone number, give the program a missed call, and get a call back prompting them to press one or two. The reports are collected, filtered, translated, and posted from the program's headquarters in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh by a combination of professional journalists and trained workers from rural areas that CGNet serves. Reports have come in from Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh. From its conception in 2010 to September 2014, over 5,800 reports were posted and over 430,000 calls were made to the system (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain and Thies 2014). Now, CGNet posts 10 reports at intervals throughout the day, two of which are always songs. For a report to be posted, it must a truthful, relevant to the broader community (rather than a personal issue), and the contributor must have tried to solve the issue on his or her own. Usually, posts are about issues "affecting an individual, but symptomatic of greater institutional failure" (Saha 2012). Songs must be cultural rather than pop or religious songs. (R. Kasa, personal interview, November 16, 2014; Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies 2014)

The most notable aspect of CGNet is its ability to engage the government and produce tangible results. Stories that result in a positive response from the government officials and solve the reported problem are referred to as "impact stories." Action team members work for CGNet in the field and pressure government officials to respond to the grievances. One of the highly publicized cases is that of Pitbasu Bhoi, a man who gained employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but did not receive his wages. When his son fell sick, he could not afford the medical payments, leading to his son's death. A report was published on the CGNet system, and eventually picked up by the mainstream media. The government subsequently paid Bhoi the full amount he earned (Agrawal, 2013). This single case represents a major goal of citizen journalism initiatives like CGNet Swara: to promote government accountability and provide communities with a sense of efficacy.

This type of participatory media is still relatively new. In India, information and communication technologies (ICTs) that not only provide information but also allow contributors to become active participants in their community's development are rare, and those that do exist have not reached an area as widespread as CGNet's (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies, 2014; Nath 2014). A multitude of development projects function through mobile phones around the world, but few claim to function as a new form of media. In Bangladesh, Grameenphone helps women repay their microloans (Goggin and Clark 2009), and during the North African revolutions, Google created a "Speak to Tweet" application to circumvent government censorship (Boller-Muller, Merle 2011). In many countries, farmers are using phones to improve agriculture in a myriad of ways.

Even with the advent of the Internet, tablets, televisions, and laptop computers, cellphones are the form of technology that has penetrated rural areas of the world most deeply. In

areas with weak infrastructure, cellphone use is still viable and even widespread (Diamond 2010). As of 2005, 71% of Indians live in rural areas, and some villages have 100% cellphone penetration (Agarwal, Kumar, Nanavati, Rajput 2010). Among these cellphone owners, 80% have shared their cellphone with a family member or friend ("The Emergence of Mobile Phones" n.d.), therefore increasing the amount of citizens with access a mobile phone and its applications. As the second largest mobile phone user in the world (Ministry of Health and Family Services, Government of India 2012), up-to-date research in India on the usage of this ubiquitous technology is very relevant. Additionally, much of the research on the intersection of media and social change has been done in Western countries, where the economic and political realities are vastly different from rural India (Downing 2008).

Through my study, I hope to discover the nuanced usage patterns and social consequences of CGNet Swara in Sindhar village in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh. I hope to understand who primarily uses the program, how they use it, and what motivates the citizens to use the service. I also want to discern the impact of CGNet's introduction in the village. I will discern this information through personal interviews, focus groups, and a brief survey. While usage patterns from a single village cannot be applied to the thousands in India, the results can potentially illuminate what the successes and challenges are of implementing this type of technology.

*II. Methods*

I conducted research both at the CGNet Swara headquarters in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh and in Sindhar village, Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh. I chose Rewa district for two main reasons. First, it was accessible via overnight train from the Bhopal office, whereas many of the

other villages that use CGNet are more remote. Second, a member of the CGNet staff lives in the town of Dabhaura in Rewa district and would be a good resource and be able to fulfill the important role of community liaison with regional knowledge. Once I arrived in Rewa district, I identified the village Sindhar to particularly focus on with similar criteria as I had identified Rewa district. Sindhar is about four kilometers from Dabhaura, the town where I was living, and a CGNet resource person lived there. I knew I wanted to use her as a source of information, and she could act as a closer liaison with the community. Finally, the village of Sindhar occupied a compact area, which made accessing respondents easier.

For this study I employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. I analyzed the CGNet archives and used individual interviews, focus group discussions, and a quantitative survey to gather information. I also conducting a field mapping exercise with some residents of Sindhar on my first day, not only so I could become more acquainted with the citizens and their community, but so that they could become familiar with my presence and my purpose for visiting.

While at the Bhopal office, I read and categorized the archives of postings from Rewa district as a whole to understand what issues the region faces and to assess any patterns in reports. The reports are all archived on the CGNet website; each call has a blog post including the audio of the original call. Starting in October 2014 and working my way backward, I manually sorted through all the posts to find ones from Rewa district because the website does not have sophisticated or extensive organization system. I categorized each post based on the issues mentioned into the topics "water access," "Public Distribution System," "land rights," "entitlements" including midday meal scheme, disability services, and pensions, "education," "community conflicts" meaning issues between community members rather than issues with the

government, "infrastructure" such as roads and sanitation, "emergency," "positive reports," and finally an "other" category for miscellaneous posts that did not fit into the above categories. Although the Public Distribution System and education are technically entitlements from the government as well, they had enough posts on their own that I created separate categories for them. I also noted the number of "impacts" each month. In total, I analyzed 16 months of posts, tracing back to July 2013. This included 230 posts total. Because some posts included grievances about more than one topic and were included in more than one category, the percentages exceed 100%.

To understand the user demographics and awareness of CGNet in Sindhar specifically, I conducted a short verbal survey of 50 villagers [see appendix for complete list of questions]. 27 respondents were female and 23 respondents were male. The ages of respondents ranged from 18 years old to 80 years old. I administered the survey verbally as opposed to on paper because much of the population that I wanted to reach is illiterate, hence the necessity for CGNet as a verbal and audio platform. In some cases, I simply asked the five survey questions, but for respondents whom I would also be interviewing more in depth, the survey questions came at the beginning of their interview. Because of the nature of a verbal survey, I assigned respondents' answers to categories after completing the surveys. The first four questions were easily separated as yes or no answers, and to categorize the answers about how often each user listens to CGNet, I put each answer into the categories "daily" for users who responded that they listened daily, "weekly" for users who responded that they listened anywhere from three to five days, "monthly" for responses less than weekly, and "never" for users who never called to listen to CGNet.

I interviewed individuals in Sindhar to understand personal motivations for using CGNet,

their experience with the program, and their perceptions of the impact in Sindhar. I asked about how they began using CGNet, what their usage habits were, how they felt when they first were introduced to CGNet, and if they had noticed any changes in the community since CGNet's introduction. In total, I interviewed 22 people. For the most part the respondents were chosen at random or at the discretion of my community liaisons. I interviewed an action team member and a trainer from Rewa to understand what made them interested in a higher level of involvement and their observations. I interviewed a staff member at the CGNet office to gain an understanding of how the program functions. Finally, I interviewed two newspaper reporters from two separate publications that are circulated in Dabhaura to gain an understanding of the print media climate in the area. Because of the variety of respondents, I adjusted my interview questions for each person.

I used focus group discussions to understand the community's memory of when CGNet was introduced and to generate ideas about how the community has changed, if at all. I conducted two focus group discussion, one consisting of five women and one consisting of six men to ensure that both groups felt comfortable expressing their ideas openly and were not impacted by gender relations in the village. I used my community partners to help gather participants and mainly utilized the villagers who were available since I did not need any specific users. The men's group included members ranging from ages 23 to 46, about half of whom worked in agriculture. The women's group included members between the ages of 30 and 36, all of whom were members of a self-help group. I asked what they remembered about CGNet's introduction, who they perceived to use CGNet the most, and why they thought that, in addition to asking about any changes they had noticed among village inhabitants.

Before utilizing any of the above methods, I verbally asked for consent and asked

whether respondents wanted their real names used in the final report or to remain anonymous. All respondents chose to be identified by name, so I have done so in the following report. Finally, a pertinent aspect of my research was informing the community about my purpose for entering their village. Because I was inquiring about relationships between different members of the village and involving many members of their community over the course of a week, an important step before asking any survey or interview questions was to clarify my study and status as a student, as well as giving them an opportunity to ask any questions about my project. Then, the respondents could make a fully informed decision about their participation and understand their role within my study.

*III. Findings*

 i. CONTENT OF REPORTS FROM REWA DISTRICT

Rewa district in northeast Madhya Pradesh is the district containing Sindhar, the village I focused my study on. It was the first district in Madhya Pradesh to be exposed to CGNet (J. Yadav, personal interview, November 23, 2014). 83.27% of Rewa district's population lives in rural areas (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). Every day, three to four reports come in to the CGNet server from Rewa district (R. Kasa, personal interview, November 14th, 2014). The published posts provide a broad understanding of the issues faced in the area, including Sindhar village, and show the reporting structure.

Every report follows a common format. Each one posted on the website begins with the contributor's name and the district, block, and village they are calling from. If the contributor themselves is not the one experiencing an issue, the contributor, who is acting as a liaison, specifies who he or she is talking to. In some cases the report generalizes and says "villagers" if

the contributor received information from more than one person, while other times a specific

name is used. Next comes the content of the message, which includes any efforts to address the

issue and a request for listeners to call the officials and pressure them into addressing the

problem. The contributor's name and phone number are posted at the end, and in the case of

grievance reports (as opposed to impact posts, songs, or announcements) the relevant official's

phone number is also included. Impact posts follow a similar structure, but end by thanking

everyone who called the relevant government officials instead of a request for help. See

appendix for example post.

Analysis of reports from Rewa district between October 2014 and July 2013 showed that

the two most commonly reported grievances involved access to water and entitlements. 25% of

posts discussed issues related to water, specifically broken hand pumps. Additionally, most of

the reports regarding hand pumps came in the summer months between June and August 2014;

56% of reports about water access were posted in this time frame. Entitlements made up 20% of

the total reports, and included topics such as mid-day meal scheme, pensions, disability services,

Indira Awaas Yojana[*], and other types of monetary compensation, resources, or services the

citizens have a right to from the government. Complaints regarding the Public Distribution

System and ration cards made up their own category and encompassed 13% of reports; when

these reports are included within the "entitlements" category, "entitlements" make up the

majority of posts. An action team member from Rewa district observed a similar trend,

estimating that the most common issue villagers faced had to do with hand pumps, followed by

issues regarding ration cards and mid-day meal scheme (R. Prajapati, personal interview,

November 16, 2014).

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[*] Indira Awaas Yogana is a social welfare scheme run by the Government of India intended to provide housing for
the rural poor.

Reports about land rights made up 14% of reports. Two types of complaints regarding land rights were common. First were posts explaining that a particular group of adivasis had lived on a piece of land for a certain amount of years or generations, and now were attempting to acquire formal rights to the land. Second were posts announcing that the government planned to or already had demolished their village or homes.

Posts detailing community conflict, defined as grievances between members of the same village rather than between villagers and government officials, made up 7% of posts. Often times, these posts complained of discrimination or harassment toward the Scheduled Tribe/Scheduled Caste (ST/SC) villagers from upper caste members. This harassment manifested itself in the form of verbal threats and physical harassment for a variety of reasons.

Nine percent of posts were about infrastructure, such as roads or sanitation. Eight percent were about education, such as a lack of teachers or angunvari in the village, and seven percent were about electricity. The remaining posts were either about emergencies such as sickness among animals or humans (3%), positive reports such as announcements that a doctor was administering free vaccinations in the area (6.5%), or did not fall into any of the above categories (1%). Miscellaneous posts included a report about a farmer suicide and request for compensation for his family, and an announcement about the environmental impact of certain religious traditions.

Over the course of the 15 months, total reports increased significantly, as did impact posts specifically. Thirty-six impacts were reported, and made up 16% of total posts from Rewa district on the website. Three to four primary contributors submitted most reports. They most likely worked as resource persons for CGNet in their village, action team members who focus on contacting officials and creating impacts from the reports, or trainers.

ii. INCEPTION & RECEPTION OF CGNET SWARA IN SINDHAR

Sindhar is a village in the Kota panchayat of Jawa block in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh. The panchayat includes four different villages, with a total population of 856 people. 43.69% belong to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India 2011). About 120 people over the age of 18 live in Sindhar specifically (A. A. Kahn, personal interview, November 21, 2014). Sindhar is located on private land owned by upper caste families, or simply "rich people" as many interviewees referred to them. However, Sindhar is also made up of residents of the nearby village Chhipiya, which is located on government land. The residents there have battled with the local government for years over land rights, forcing people to move to Sindhar during periods when the government demolished homes. While the villagers currently have the right to remain on the land, the population is shifting between the two villages.

Jagdish Yadav, an activist for adivasi land rights, introduced CGNet to the area in 2010. He became acquainted with CGNet during one of his trips to Bhopal for work on land rights, where he met a colleague from Chhattisgarh who was involved in CGNet. For the first two years, he spread information about CGNet casually through word of mouth. After attending trainings in Delhi, Jagdish became authorized to train users himself. He formally began advertising CGNet in 2012 by posting banners in the town of Dabhaura explaining the technology and providing the phone number. He conducted workshops with the surrounding villages and began reporting stories from the villages he visited (J. Yadav, personal interview, November 23, 2014).

When villagers in Sindhar first became aware of CGNet, interviewees report feeling "fearful" and "confused" (G. Prasad, personal interview, November 19, 2014; S. Dulari, personal interview, November 20, 2014; N. Lal, personal interview, November 24, 2014; V. Barla,

personal interview, November 25, 2014). Mobile phone ownership is widespread throughout the village. 60% of survey respondents owned their own mobile phone, and 100% had access to a family member's phone. However, prior to CGNet's integration into Sindhar villagers were skeptical of technology, both the Internet and mobile phones, and its utility (A.A. Kahn, personal interview, November 21, 2014). They were curious about the new technology but not very active in using it because they did not believe that mobile phones could be used as either a form of media or viable complaint tool (J. Yadav, personal interview, November 23, 2014). The village does not consume media such as television or radio, and although newspapers are distributed in the nearby town of Dabhaura, the villagers do not read them. Bahini Darbar, a handwritten newsletter produced by a local group of women and distributed monthly, is the primary source of news in Sindhar.

The major turning point in Sindhar's usage of CGNet came when 31 villagers received their wages through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (NREGA) in 2012 after the issue was reported to CGNet. The workers were all from the Kota panchayat and were employed for 11 days building the road that connects Sindhar to the highway ("30 of us" 2013). They completed the work in 2011, but none of the workers received the wages they earned. Over the course of three to four days, the workers each recorded a complaint in their own language on CGNet. Although the citizens were unsure about the calls' effectiveness at first, they reasoned that they had nothing to lose by trying to enact change through CGNet, since other avenues had been unsuccessful (focused group discussion, male Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). In 2012, an officer visited the village and addressed the problem, and everyone was paid his or her wages ("Impact: 31 laborers got NREGA wages" 2014).

Janmavati Verma was the primary Sindhar resident that reported the issue to CGNet and

assisted the workers in recording their own posts as well. She became a resource person in the

village after Jagdish introduced the program. Jagdish tries to identify one or two such people in

each village in the area (J. Yadav, personal interview, November 23, 2014). As a resource

person, her role entails helping other villagers report issues and acting as a liaison with the

CGNet platform. She uses her role in a self-help group and as one of the creators of the monthly

Bahini Darbar newsletter to spread awareness about CGNet. When villagers were waiting to

receive their wages, Janmavati encouraged and facilitated self-help groups to record messages at

their weekly meetings (J. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014).[*] In the two years

since the NREGA payments were made, Janmavati has taken on a significant leadership role

within the village, and many people come to her now when they have an issue they would like to

report (G. Prasad, personal interview, November 19, 2014; G. Devi, personal interview,

November 19, 2014; J. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014; M. Kumari, personal

interview, November 20, 2014; M. Devi, personal interview, November 23, 2014).

Before the NREGA impact convinced villagers of CGNet's effectiveness, the event

helped establish Janmavati as a villager leader. When she first took on the role, she experienced

backlash from upper echelon members of society who disapproved of her powerful status as a

lower caste woman. A government official called her father-in-law and told him to make

Janmavati stop working with CGNet. In another instance, a teacher from the local town of

Dabhaura called and threatened her, which resulted in his arrest by the police (J. Verma, personal

interview, November 20, 2014). Jagdish experienced similar opposition when he first introduced

CGNet which took the form of allegations from upper caste members of society that CGNet was

causing Naxal activity and religious conversions (J. Yadav, personal interview, November 21,

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[*] There are six self–help groups total, and each woman in the village is a member of a self-help group.

2014). After the NREGA wages were distributed, many villagers saw the value in CGNet and how it could solve problems much faster relative to other methods at their disposal. As its popularity grew, the harassment stopped and the program was accepted as a productive addition to their community.

iii. USER DEMOGRAPHICS & PATTERNS

CGNet is a well-integrated program in Sindhar. 92% of villagers were familiar with CGNet, and 74% had called in to listen at least one time. 48% of listeners report that they listen to CGNet at least once a day. 16% listen weekly, 12% listen monthly, and 26% of villagers in Sindhar never listen to CGNet. Recording was less widespread, with 50% of villagers having called in at least once to record a message. Interviewees responded that they enjoyed recording and listening songs, sometimes as often as every day (N. Kol, personal interview, November 19, 2014; M. Kumari, personal interview, November 20, 2014; M. Kol, personal interview, November 21, 2014; S. Barla, November 24, 2014), although most only recorded when they had a problem they wanted solved. In other cases, the user did not record himself, but when they felt their was an issue they wanted reported, they sought out Janmavati, the village resource person, to record the message for them (G. Prasad, personal interview, November 19, 2014; G. Devi, personal interview, November 19, 2014).

Although men and women listen to CGNet in approximately equal proportions – 70% of women have listened to CGNet and 74% of men have listened to CGNet – women tend to have deeper and more interactive connection with the technology. Women listen more often; 52% of women listen daily whereas only 24% of men listen daily. More women have also recorded. 52% of women have recorded at least once, whereas only 30% of men have recorded at least once.

Both male and female residents of the village recognized this disparity, although their beliefs about the reason for it differed. Men believed they were busier with their daily work and therefore did not have as much time for CGNet, while more of the women spent their day at home and had time to spend calling CGNet (focused group discussion, male Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). Women agreed that the reason they utilized CGNet more was because they stayed in the home, but provided another root cause. The women are situated in closer proximity to the home, the school, the hand pumps, and other village facilities, making them more in touch with and more strongly affected by the problems facing the village (focused group discussion, female Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). A younger man recognized this logic as well. He furthered it by saying that although the problems are actually created by men, women suffer from them more acutely and are therefore more motivated to solve them (V. Kol, personal interview, November 25, 2014).

Children are also users, sometimes helping their mothers in the case that they are not familiar or comfortable with how to use a mobile phone (J. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014; focused group discussion, female Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). A report posted on CGNet announced the creation of a Dalit Bal Swara center, which educates children after school and holds workshops once a week training adults how to use CGNet. The report noted that, "[the contributor] has rescued workers from his village who were sold as bonded laborers and would like these children to know how to use Swara when they are in trouble" ("Children in Bal Swara center" 2013).

Listening to CGNet is a social activity that users do not often undertake alone. Women often call and record messages in the self-help group meetings on Sundays. Many users call in to listen to reports in the evening, after workers come in from the field for the day. Some survey

respondents who responded that they either do not call into CGNet or call infrequently qualified their answer by saying that they listen to CGNet when their husband, child, or other family member is listening as if it was a television on in the room, despite the fact that they do not call themselves. Additionally, because users often seek out the village resource person or another knowledgeable user to record messages, reporting becomes a process involving multiple people.

iv. MOTIVATIONS

Because of how CGNet was popularized in the village, the most immediate motivator in the villagers' minds is the prospect of tangible change and outcomes from a report. Villagers praise it as being faster than any other tool at their disposal to complain about problems to the government officials. Although contributors still must submit a paper complaint to the government officials through traditional means before reporting a problem to CGNet, the process is significantly accelerated and demystified when CGNet is involved. While villagers saw Bahini Darbar as a valuable platform to express their grievances, it also did not have the relative immediacy that CGNet does (J. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014). The key aspect that distinguishes CGNet from these other avenues is the pressure it applies on the officials. Villagers felt that the pressure and speed with which CGNet functioned made it an effective tool whose power they trust and believe in (J. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014; S. Diwan, personal interview, November 20, 2014; A.A. Kahn, personal interview, November 21, 2014; V. Kol, personal interview, November 25, 2014).

The social and entertainment factors are prominent motivations. Villages enjoy the content, particularly the combination of information and music (focused group discussion, female Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). Primarily women listeners are highly motivated

to call by the songs. They enjoy both recording themselves as well as hearing the recorded songs (N. Kol, personal interview, November 19, 2014; M. Kumari, personal interview, November 20, 2014; S. Dulari, personal interview, November 20, 2014; S. Barla, personal interview, November 24, 2014). The cultural aspect is one that does not exist in newspapers, the other form of media that the villagers consume.

Users also continue to use CGNet day after day because it connects them with other villages and other citizens in similar predicaments as them. Respondents reported that they like to hear about other villages that are facing the same issues and to hear how they are resolved. As one respondent explained it, "We were only a frog in one well, now we are connected to other villages" (M. Devi, personal interview, November 23, 2014). Another girl explained that she liked hearing the same singers regularly, and it made her want to respond with her own song for her "fans" (S. Barla, personal interview, November 24, 2014). By listening to CGNet, listeners develop a sense of camaraderie with other members of SC/ST groups (N. Kol, personal interview, November 19, 2014; M. Devi, personal interview, November 23, 2014).

v. IMPACT

After using CGNet for two years and experiencing the positive results it can bring, the SC/ST residents of Sindhar feel more empowered, more confident in their values, have a stronger belief that they can enact change, and a more positive attitude. One of the women that makes Bahini Darbar described herself specifically as feeling more fearless, and feeling better equipped to communicated with government officials (M. Devi, personal interview, November 23, 2014). Citizens are much more aware of their rights and power, and are using this awareness to make other citizens aware of their rights (J. Yadav, personal interview, November 23, 2014; S. K. Kol,

personal interview, November 23, 2014). As individuals become more confident and empowered, the community has become stronger and a higher level of trust and moral support has developed. They are more cooperative with each other, are "united to fight with the government" and will come together in the event that any other injustices are brought upon the community (G. Prasad, personal interview, November 19, 2014; M. Devi, personal interview, November 23, 2014). CGNet is also specifically strengthening the bond between younger family members, who have become more confident and aggressive in their attempts to solve problems, and their older counterparts, who may need assistance to operate their mobile phones (R. Lal, personal interview, November 24, 2014; N. Lal, personal interview, November 24, 2014).

CGNet has also changed the way women interact within the village. While before it was difficult for them to leave the home, now they go out more (J. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014; C. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014). Women's identities are not defined solely in relation to their husbands. Because women perceive CGNet to be a low-pressure forum, they do not feel shy while reporting (focused group discussion, female Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). This has enabled women to speak for themselves, rather than speaking through their husbands (focused group discussion, male Sindhar residents, November 21, 2014). Now, women are known by their own name, rather than just by their husband's (C. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014). Finally, one respondent noticed that husbands fear their wives more because they know they can report to CGNet (V. Kol, personal interview, November 25, 2014).

The relationship between upper and lower caste members of the village has not significantly changed, although villagers also responded that there was little conflict to begin with between the groups (S. Deva, personal interview, November 21, 2014; A.A. Kahn, personal

interview, November 21, 2014). However, individual leaders like Janmavati and her husband,
who also acts as a liaison with CGNet, their relationships with upper caste members of the
village has improved, and due to their leadership status, upper caste villagers now come to them
for advice (C. Verma, personal interview, November 20, 2014). The positive result of their
leadership has inspired others to take on leadership roles as well. Other women are becoming
liaisons with CGNet that villagers can go to when they have a problem they need help reporting
(M. Kumari, personal interview, November 20, 2014; M. Devi, personal interview, November
23, 2014). One respondent explained his plans to contest the current village headman in the
subsequent elections (N. Lal, personal interview, November 24, 2014).

*IV. Discussion*

        i. CONTENT ANALYSIS

An analysis of the posts from Rewa district reveals two main points: the content of posts
and usage trends. Compared to the overall distribution of posts, Rewa shared some similarities
but differed in two distinct ways. In the overall CGNet posts, 65.22% covered issues
of governance, which included issues with schools, hospitals, wages, corruption and more, while
12.48% posts were about payment - same as what I defined as "entitlements." However, citizens
in Rewa district suffered more from lack of access to water and broken hand pumps, therefore
resulting in more posts about this issue. In this analysis, 41.46% of posts were categorized
as "politics," including posts about rallies, conventions, and fairs (Saha 2012), which were not
apparent at all in the posts from Rewa district.

The content of the posts informed citizens of their rights in multiple ways. Some do so by
simply reporting a grievance. In doing so, listeners will recognize that they too have a right to

something they may have been unaware of before. When their fellow villagers complain about something, they become aware that they can complain as well. Other posts explicitly informed citizens of their rights, such as one post that outlined children's right to free and compulsory education and specified that children with special needs also have additional rights as well. ("All the children" 2013).

CGNet usage in Rewa district followed a general upward trend. Even taking into consideration that posts dipped in spring 2014 due to a technical issue (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies 2014), over the course of 15 months usage per month increased. In the first three months, XX amount of posts, compared to this summer. CGNet's posting capacity per day has increased in the past month as well; since September 2014 they began releasing 10 messages per day, up from seven (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies 2014).

Usage increased around certain events in the region as well. Between the months of June 2013 and August 2013, posts about hand pumps significantly increased, while in October 2013 when there was an election, a slew of posts came in reporting that they did not have adequate road infrastructure to access the polls.

ii. USAGE DETAILS

CGNet's usage remained relatively equitable throughout Sindhar. Access to mobile phones or ability to use them did not prevent people from using CGNet or affect what demographic of the village had access to the program. Sindhar had 100% cellphone penetration based on the criteria that each family had a cellphone, which has been shown in villages around India as well (Agarwal 2013). In previous studies on media usage in rural India, access to information, while democratizing access to information, also created an "information

underclass" of those who were unable to access the technology. Often times women made up

a proportion of this underclass because men mediated technology usage and women did not have

the skills to use the technology (Johnson 2001). This was not the case in Sindhar. Although more

men did own their own cellphones, a sizable number of women owned their own as well. With

half of Indian households sharing their cellphones with friends ("The Emergence of Mobile

Phones" n.d. ), women who do not own a phone or who would be restricted from using their

husband's have alternate access points. Also, because CGNet was often used during self-help

group meetings, women could access the technology there. Although women in Sindhar were

more unfamiliar with cellphone technology, it did not prevent them from using CGNet. Children

and youth in the village helped older women operate mobile phones.

  Women did not constitute an information underclass; they actually surpassed men in the

depth of involvement and engagement with CGNet. Women's engagement with CGNet in

Sindhar is one of the largest areas where Sindhar stands to be an example for future

implementation of CGNet to encourage women's usage. While overall only 12% of contributors

are women (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies 2014), in Sindhar 56% of contributors are women.

They also listened more often. Women's introduction to CGNet is responsible for their increased

engagement. When villagers did not receive their wages from working under NREGA,

Janmavati, Sindhar's resource person, worked with the self-help groups to call and report

messages weekly until the government responded. Women became familiar with the program

and regularly used it in a safe environment, learning from other women. Additionally, women

are accustomed to sharing and reading local news through the monthly newsletter, Bahini

Darbar, which is produced and distributed by a group of women from multiple villages in the

area. Women were more attracted to the songs as well. The exception was women older than

46 years old. They were the least familiar with CGNet out of any other group, possibly due to their age making them more unfamiliar with technology and stronger adherents to traditional gender roles that call for women to withhold their opinions.

Of the primary reporters in the area, the most prominent indicator that predicted they would take on a more involved role is their previous civic engagement. At the three levels of involvement — resource person at the village level, action team member at the regional level, and trainer at the regional level — each had prior experience that predisposed them to become activists through CGNet as well. Jagdish, the trainer who introduced CGNet to Rewa district and Sindhar village specifically, was heavily involved with an NGO that works on land rights for adivasis. Ramashankar, an action team member from Rewa, used to visit government officials himself. Janmavati is part of Bahini Darbar, and therefore had experience collecting stories and reporting them. This shows that not all citizens will contribute to the platform in equal amounts, and that some citizens, such as the ones mentioned above, will take on correspondent-like roles.

iii. MOTIVATION

The NREGA wage payment success in 2012 was the turning point that motivated citizens to begin using CGNet. With the exception of citizens who were already activism-minded, the pure motivation of speaking out did not convince people that CGNet was a beneficial addition to their lives. Although other mobile phone platforms in India such as Viokiosk, a mobile information kiosk, have been primarily used because citizens enjoyed "speaking out" (Agarwal, Kumar, Nanavati, & Rajput 2010), when CGNet users contribute to the platform, they are focused on "goal-specific communication." In other words, they only record a message on the program if they believe that will directly affect their everyday lives (Seshagari, Sagar, & Joshi

2007). This is further supported by the fact that citizens didn't seem to notice or become disillusioned if their recording was never actually posted due to the strict formatting and limited postings released per day. Making their voice heard was not the primary motivation for contributing to CGNet, rather marked results and listening were more important.

This goes against previous research on CGNet, where contributors were in fact dissuaded from using the program due to the fact that their recordings were never posted. Users had confusion about the process and therefore did not understand why their recordings were not released (Marathe, O'Neill, Pain, & Thies 2014). Users in Sindhar perhaps did not face this same confusion; they understood that the recording process was a complicated one and often times utilized the village resource person to record a call in the proper format.

Users had a different motivation for contributing songs to the platform. Users did report that they enjoyed singing because it allowed them to speak out in their own language. Listeners had the same motivation for hearing both songs and grievances; it fostered a sense of camaraderie between themselves and other villages.

My research in Sindhar shows that an important part of information and communication technology is that it causes the tangible results, such as wage payments, and does not only provide information. The results motivated citizens and caused them to adopt the technology in the first place. In developing regions, ICTs that only distribute information are not only less desirable but also less successful and even detrimental. ICTs are not just about a right to information, but constitute a vital link in raising the livelihoods of villagers (Nath 2014). So CGNet, whether it purports to be a development tool or not, is acting as one and that is a large part of its success and desirability.

iv. IMPACTS AND SUCCESSES

Mudlier, Donner, Thies (2013) initially found grievance redressal to be most impactful. On the surface, I found the same to be true. Clearly, receiving wages they are due affects their lives. It's the most obvious and tangible impact, but there are other changes that have taken place among the community. People become active social agents when they have access to the CGNet forum, and because of this access they gain power and can challenge the traditional village elite (Johnson 2001).

Leadership among the SC/ST members of Sindhar significantly affected its acceptance in the village. While the posting requirements may initially seem to hinder usage and affect the program's success, it in fact forces a leader to come forward. This augments the empowerment caused by CGNet as a whole because citizens see a member of their community becoming a well-respected leader. Janmavati's position as a leadership figure inspires women to use CGNet and take on more responsibility.

Although women and lower caste members of Sindhar felt more confident and empowered, the essential hierarchy of the village did not change. Rather, CGNet provides a platform to transcend hierarchy. This is a major aspect of alternative media: it provides an alternative space that bypasses social hierarchies (Pettit, Salazar, Dagron 2009). By reporting to CGNet or listening to the information, users circumvent the traditional communication and information avenues that may be blocked due to their status.

Lower caste and adivasi members of society still live in separate sections of the village than the upper caste members, and women still perform most of the work in the home, but now possess more knowledge and agency over their lives and futures. Women's usage of CGNet and mobile phones in general does not change their position in the domestic sphere, but extends it

(Tenhunan 2008).

CGNet occupies the rare space in media and technology that preferences and strengthens the community rather than focusing on individuals and their needs (Tenhunen 2008). The program can be classified as a "liberation technology," or a "form of information and communication technology that can expand political, social, and economic freedom." It enables users to "report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protests, monitor elections, scrutinize governments, deepen participation and expand the horizons of freedom" (Diamond 2010). Such a definition does not restrict the social effects of technology to merely authoritarian countries, where freedom of press and governance issues are more commonly chastised. Countries with thriving democracies such as India, which are still home to marginalized communities, can utilize the technology in the context of their own lives. Citizen journalism can redefine social and cultural norms and shift power relations. CGNet allows citizens to reclaim their citizenship and become active participants in their futures (Pettit, Salazar, Dagron 2009).

Although CGNet's impacts have not been negative, the positive results are uneven. This can possibly be attributed to the newness of the technology and the short period of time since CGNet was widely adopted. Not every woman expressed how much she enjoyed calling in and listening to songs, and many upper caste citizens, although not explicitly against CGNet, seemed to grudgingly accept it. In the majority of cases, however, the program benefited its users and improved their quality of life.

*V. Conclusion*

Undoubtedly, CGNet has been a success in Sindhar and has gained widespread usage and resulted in positive change for a large portion of the community. However, if citizens had not gained their wages though the NREGA scheme, CGNet's usage could be next to nothing in Sindhar. The tangible results caused the villagers to adopt CGNet and allowed them to believe that the forum could be truly useful and could bring positive change to their lives. Among information and communication technologies as a whole, the ability to aid development is a crucial aspect that causes users to adopt the technology, continue using it, and feel positive impacts from it.

CGNet has unique usage among the women residents compared to the wider CGNet community. They have strong involvement with the program and have integrated into their regular practices, such as the self-help groups. Their increased usage has also resulted in a deeper impact than other demographics in the village. Although empowerment is by no means complete or felt by every woman, relationships between men and women are becoming more equitable.

The most important lesson from CGNet's usage in Sindhar is how it became integrated in the community. The technology was introduced as a program that can aid current programs and fit into daily life rather than becoming an unnatural and imposing project. Mobile phone ownership was already widespread. Using CGNet in self-help groups came easily because they already reported and read news in the Bahini Darbar newsletter. CGNet complimented rather than contradicted the villager's habits, a strategy that could be applied when introducing CGNet to villages around central India.

## VI. Recommendations for Further Study

The most beneficial study on the impact of CGNet would be longitudinal, potentially over the course of many years. Because CGNet is so new and two years is still a relatively short time for a new program to be implemented, adopted, and integrated into the community, another study following its usage over time or revisiting the village in another two years would be extremely beneficial. Researching CGNet across multiple villages, comparing their usage patterns, and determining how CGNet was introduced would also be useful.

Future research may also illicit more consistent and reliable results if someone from India conducted it. My presence and novelty as a foreigner may have affected the responses given in interviews. An Indian, perhaps one more familiar with the region, could obtain more consistent results.

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*VIII. Appendix*

  i.  SURVEY QUESTIONS:

    Do you own a mobile phone?

Are you familiar with CGNet Swara?

Have you ever called in to CGNet to either listen or record?

How often do you listen to CGNet?

ii. GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

When did you first find out about CGNet?

How did you first find out about CGNet?

What types of stories interest you the most?

How did you feel when you first called CGNet?

Since CGNet's introduction to the village, has the community of the village

changed at all? If so, what has changed?

Has your relationship with the panchayat/government officials changed at all?

Why do you use CGNet as often as you do?

What makes you want to continue calling CGNet?

When do you usually use CGNet?

Who do you feel uses CGNet the most in the village, and why?

Are there any issues you feel that CGNet does not address?

iii. POSTS FROM REWA DISTRICT

| Topic/Month | Oct | Sep | Aug | Jul | Jun | May | Apr | Mar | Feb | Jan | 2013 | Dec | Nov | Oct | Sept | Aug | July |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Water access | 8 | 3 | 10 | 14 | 9 | 4 | 2 | | 3 | 1 | | | 1 | | 3 | | 1 |
| Ration Card/PDS | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | | 2 | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Land rights | 5 | 6 | 2 | 1 | | 3 | | 2 | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 3 |
| Electricity | 4 | | | 2 | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | | | 3 | 1 | 2 | | |
| Entitlements | 3 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 5 | | 2 | 1 | | 6 | 2 | 3 |
| Education | | 1 | 2 | 2 | | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | | 2 | 1 | 4 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Community issues | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Infrastructure | 4 | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | |
| Emergency help | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | | | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Positive Report | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Other | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Impact: | 5 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Total: | 23 | 14 | 20 | 29 | 16 | 15 | 11 | 8 | 11 | 10 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 17 | 11 | 15 |

## iv. SURVEY RESULTS

| | Mobile | | Familiar | | Listen | | Record | | Frequency | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | yes | family | Yes | no | yes | no | yes | no | daily | weekly | monthly | never |
| **Females** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18-25 | 4 | 2 | 6 | | 6 | | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | |
| 26-35 | 8 | 2 | 10 | | 9 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 9 | | | 1 |
| 36-45 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | 1 |
| 46 + | 1 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Total: 27 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Males** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18-25 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | | 3 |
| 26-35 | 5 | 2 | 7 | | 6 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 36-45 | 3 | 1 | 4 | | 4 | | 4 | | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| 46+ | | 4 | 4 | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total: 23 | | | | | | | | | | | | |