Internet and Society: Challenges and Solution
(Special reference to young surfers in India)

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I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country with a large diversities prevailing. The length and breadth of the country is divided into many languages, many cultures, many demographic locations and most importantly many entertainment consumers. While television boom is on its peak with more than 700 television channels beaming in India, the second biggest consumer of entertainment content is Internet.

According to a KPMG report of FICCI FRAMES in 2013, India had 73.9 million unique visitors In India. Total Internet user base by the end of 2013 was 214 million users, out of which 130 million consumed Internet through mobile and smart phones, whereas 84 million users accessed internet through desktops or laptops. It is estimated that the total number of internet users will be 494 million by the year 2018, out of which 353 million users are expected to consume Internet through mobile and smart phones, whereas 141 million users are expected to access internet through desktops or laptops. According to a report by Comscore, in 2013 India had the 3rd largest internet user base after USA and China. According to the same report in 2013 India had 73.9 million unique visitors on the Internet.

Looking at the current engagement some of the key areas where Indian youth (young surfers) is involved in are e-commerce, entertainment, travel booking, gaming, searching, social networking, emails, news, and retailing on the internet.

Out of the above, the biggest exposure on the internet is in form of picture, words, audio and audio visual content that youth get exposed to by consuming content on video sites, social networking sites, blogging sites etc. Unlike the film exhibition most of the content on internet does not go through any rounds of approvals before getting published. Also, there is less amount of control needed to upload obscene and vulgar content online, especially pornographic content. The nature of internet publishing exposes youth to all kinds of content. With the technological development and penetration of internet enabled mobiles and devices exposure to objectionable content for youth has become a primary concern for a traditional society like India.

II. COMMUNICATION THEORIES

The process of communication was simply defined by **Lasswell's** in his essential question which still remains timeless (1949): "Who says what in what channel to whom with what effects?" **(SURESH, 2003)**

Lasswell gave a definition by putting emphasis on who (sender), what (message), channel (platform), whom (receiver) and effect. In the theory given by Lasswell the process of communication does not end at sending a message. It is all about creating a desired impact in the minds of the receiver. In other words any process of communication will leave some or the other impact on the minds of the receivers. While the process of communication was defined by Lasswell in a simple way, Williams has given an understanding about the correlation of technology and cultural form.

Raymond Williams, Television: technology and cultural form

The basic assumption of technological determinism is that a new technology – a printing press or a communications satellite – 'emerges' from technical study and experiment. It then changes the society or the sector into which it has 'emerged'. 'We' adapt to it, because it is the new modern way.

Williams argues against such an idea by showing how 'a technical invention as such has comparatively little social significance' until it has been adapted to existing social and economic conditions. For instance, the printing press may have been invented in the fifteenth century but 'The rise in reading, and in quality, was in fact steady' and it was not until over three hundred years after the Gutenberg invention that literacy had become widespread enough in Britain to identify a middle class reading pubic. Working class literacy, by contrast, was only achieved much later as a foremost consequence of social and political processes – namely, the 1870 Education Act that introduced compulsory schooling – as opposed to technological ones. **(Laughey, 2008)**

In his theory Willam further explains that in many cases the technology was invented much before the actual demand was generated. The classic example given by him is that of television. The invention of television was due to social, political and economic demand, and thus the growth of TV happened in many markets. If we apply the same theory to internet, though it was invented in 1989, it was in early 2000 that more and more individuals started using it aggressively. William thinks we should seek equal access to media production to allow for a more democratic culture in which people have the opportunity to discuss issues, formulate ideas and creatively envision their lives. This is very relevant to the growth on Internet today.

The multidimensional demand of the internet, as well as the consumers of internet participating in the usage of it is responsible for the development of Internet. Growing popularity and usage of internet is an outcome of social, economic, cultural, informational, entertainment, leisure, political needs of individuals using it. Their clear intention is to participate in the "world wide web" and get connected with one another is responsible for the shape of Internet's gigantic growth in today's time.

III.   INTERNET – DOUBLE EDGED SWARD

Internet has proven to be a source of information for many surfers across the world. Exposure of Internet has changed youth's outlook towards the world. Internet has contributed immensely towards the growth of societies. With the invention of internet enabled smart phones the world has practically come on people's finger tips. The world is at a fast pace converging towards an internet enabled world. The power of this platform has almost transformed cultures, societies, trades, businesses, entertainment, education, information, sports, leisure, economy, voluntarism, politics, science, literature, arts into a more high tech and converged experience. Internet has almost become a layer in the foreground of almost every activity that a human being can venture into. Thus Internet is like a blessing to mankind. The information boom that the world is witnessing is due to the rapid growth of internet. Internet has almost replaced the power of knowledge and information across the world.

While we enjoy the benefits of internet, we surely cannot ignore the limitation of this powerful medium. The biggest advantage of this medium is the biggest disadvantage also. Internet is practically like a web of information. Internet enables almost anybody to disseminate information. The biggest limitation of internet is that all the information is available in the open source and almost anybody can access this information. Even more serious problem is that unlike the conventional media ownership, concept of media ownership for internet is absolutely different. Here the media consumer could also become the media owner. There are no stringent checks required to become a media platform owner in case of Internet. There is no restriction on the number of media owners.

Another quality of internet is such that unlike the popular media, the cost of owning a website on the internet is remarkably low. This enables more people to own websites. Unlike the other mass media distribution, internet does not have controlled distribution in a country like India. This exposes the young surfers to content with nudity, sexuality, pornography, vulgar language, violence, content against religion, nation etc. Internet has proven to be a personal medium; the images and sounds projected on internet leave strong impression on the minds of youth. The easy availability of internet is responsible for higher risk to the consumption of objectionable content.

Seduction of the Innocent theory of psychiatrist Fredric Wertham can be placed at the extremities of this 'direct effects' of media argument. Particularly worrying to Wertham is the influence of these mass media on 'the minds and behaviour of children who come in contact with them'. He claims that 'There is at present in all media, especially as they affect children, a pattern of violence, brutality, sadism, blood-lust, shrewdness, callous disregard for human life…The quantity of violence in all the media is stupendous'. Wertham provides evidence for his theories about the malignant effects of media from a combination of content analysis and the results of psychological tests with children who visited his clinic. **(Laughey, 2008)**

The theory of Wertham further describes that exposure of crime on Television makes the children watching them violent. Wertham went through multiple tests in controlled environment about the same. This clearly indicates that impact of sex and violence on the mind of the consumers is strong and it remains in their mind for a long time. Exposure of Sex and Violence on internet thus has a potential of creating a society of passivity, violence, misconception, wrong imitation, wrong identification and desensitization.

IV.   THE SOCIAL IMPACT

The access to Internet is widespread. Internet has penetrated in houses, bedrooms and palms of young Indians. The Indian society, which is culturally rooted, is facing the challenges of this contemporary medium. If we look at total minutes spent on the internet versus the total number of visitors on the internet, Indians on an average spend close to six hours on internet.

The biggest impact of internet is that it has given a global outlook to the youth of recent times. The society is better informed with the help of the internet. The entire world is on the fingertip of the surfers of today.

We already know that constant exposure to sex and violence can lead to violent youth. Following are some of the examples of Internet's negative impact on society.

Sunny Leony, an Indo Canadian porn star was the most Googled celebrity for the year 2011. The traffic on various pornographic sites had increased remarkably after her entry to the reality show Bigg Boss in India. The real problem arises when youth starts relating with the virtual identity like a porn star and starts expecting the same from real life. This leads to dissatisfaction, frustration and negligence of the existing reality.

Children and young adults have resorted to more mobile / internet games rather than focussing on outdoor games. Children and young adult have become isolated and arrogant today. They spend hours in front of their computer screens or smart phones. Constant interaction with computer has a risk of making them less active in dealing with individual. This can potentially harms interpersonal relations of youth. This kind of passive lifestyle also brings in problems related to physical and mental health in the long run.

There have been series of incidents reported in news papers recently where crimes have been committed by youth and they have mentioned some or the other website where they learnt the crime from. Many of the games that children play on the internet have strong immoral values attached. Violence is one the key factors that excites youth to play these games. Internet induced violence has been one of the major concerns of many societies. Internet is a personal medium; it is interactive in nature, which leads to strong perception building. Constant dissemination of violent messages / content could lead to strong behavioural change for those who are prone to such effects.

With increasing usage of social networking sites young surfers come close to virtual identities. Many times individuals fake their identities. They get involved in activities that give them vicarious pleasures. They involved in fraudulent relationships. This makes them compromise with their own human values. Youth starts ignoring, avoiding and neglecting values. This questions the foundation of human relations. The risk becomes higher when youth starts living fake identity. This could lead to failure of relationships.

Impact of internet on physical aspects will not matter much; but impact on mindset, values, cognitive frame work and perception will matter a lot. It is important to maintain cultural values. When youth start faking, copying or imitating wrong things, the whole construct is based on immoral grounds and therefore it is harmful also. The larger impact is when youth starts imagining his / her fake identify and start thinking in that manner. In one life one starts living dual identities. When fake identity is more dominant, the real identity suffers. There could be internal conflict linked to frustration.

Internet is in the hands of many children and young adults. All they are getting exposed to is a web of information. Most of it is useful but a lot of it is harmful for the young minds. It has been proven that sex and violence can bring violence in the young minds. Constant exposure to sex and violence on a long term basis can create many abnormalities in the youth. Internet brings in engagement at a virtual level. This leads youth to take action. The cyber crimes, crimes taken place with the help of internet knowledge are the biggest examples of the same.

India is a diverse and wide spread country both geographically and culturally. Internet binds this diversity. Challenges of the internet are plenty. These challenges need to be addressed in order to ensure a safe and healthy country.

V.   THE LEGAL PROVISION FOR CONTROLLING CONTENT ON INTERNET

Let us have a look at various legal aspects that control content on Internet.

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT:
Article 19 of Indian constitution states the following:

19(1) (a) every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression. (2) Nothing in sub clause (a) of clause (1) of this Article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law, relating to libel, slander, defamation, contempt of court or any other matter which offends against decency or morality or undermines the security of or tends to overthrow the State.

THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACT, 2000:
This Act aims to provide the legal infrastructure for e-commerce in India. Internet has changed the way people do business in India, it was important to have laws to govern e-business and new trends in the economy. The Act also touches upon electronic records, digital signature, digital security, hacking and digital enforceability. The act criminalizes publication of obscene information electronically and grants police powers to search any premises without a warrant and arrest individuals in violation of the act.

THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2008:
The Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008 amended the IT Act 2000 to (a) make the authentication of electronic record technology neutral, (b) provide for protection of personal information, (c) change the name and constitution of the appellate tribunal, (d) limit the liability of intermediaries and (e) establish an examiner of electronic evidence. It specifies that publishing or

transmitting of offensive or pornographic material in electronic form would be an offence. In addition the Act amends the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to include new offences such as identity theft and recording or transmitting nude images of a person without his / her permission.

The 2008 amendment broadened content that could be blocked beyond online obscenity. The newly added Section 69A grants power to the central government, "in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states or public order," to issue directions to block public access to any information "generated, transmitted, received, stored or hosted in any computer resource."

It was the amendment of Information Technology Act which put emphasis on content especially the offensive and pornographic material which started emerging as a big threat to the society. The crimes related to content are punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two to three years or with fine which may extend to five lakh rupees or with both. Although Section 69A(2) requires procedures and safeguards to be prescribed when the government exercises this power, these restrictions are unclear because they are not specified in the amendment.

CERT – IN:

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) was set up by the Department of Information Technology under the amended IT Act to implement India's filtering regime. It was assigned "the task of oversight of the Indian cyberspace for enhancing cyber protection, enabling security compliance and assurance in Government and critical sectors." There is a strong government institutions involvement in carrying out the activities of CERT – IN.

There have been cases where CERT-IN has taken help of the judiciary system to ban objectionable content in the past. Many have argued that giving CERT-IN this power through executive order violates constitutional jurisprudence, holding that specific legislation must be passed before the government can encroach on individual rights. When CERT-IN has issued orders to block specific Web sites, no communication has been made to the public beforehand. The blocking mechanism created under the IT Act provides for no review or appeal procedures, except in court, and is a permanent block. (https://opennet.net)

THE IT RULES OF 2011:

The IT Rules of 2011 stipulate that websites "cannot host information that is a grossly harmful, harassing, blasphemous, defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, libelous, invasive of privacy, hateful, or racially, ethnically objectionable, disparaging, relating or encouraging money laundering or gambling, or otherwise unlawful in any manner whatever, harm minors or infringes any patent, trademark, copyright or other proprietary right." These rules require Internet companies to remove within 36 hours of being notified by the authorities any such content.

Obscene or Vulgar content in India is very difficult to be curbed. Off late blocking access to internet content with pornography, objectionable material, content that is against public order or national security has become popular, however is not absolutely free from faults. The tech wizards have cracked this problem by accessing content through proxy servers. In recent times there have been incidents where government has directly got involved in sending requests to platforms owned by foreign companies to remove content that is found objectionable.

GOOGLE TRANSPARENCY REPORT:

The Indian government nearly doubled its requests to Google for removal of content in the second half of 2012 as compared to the first six months, the seventh transparency report from the Internet giant has noted. Every government sends requests to Google, to censor certain content online. Most of it is requested in accordance to the laws of the land. For the year 2013 following are some of the major categories under which the requests were made to censor the content on Google.

- Defamation
- Religious Offense
- Privacy and Security
- Impersonation
- Adult Content
- Hate Speech
- Bullying/Harassment
- Reason Unspecified
- Copyright
- Government Criticism
- National Security
- Violence
- Geographical Dispute
- Trademark
- Drug Abuse
- Electoral Law
- Suicide Promotion
- Other

Between January and June 2013, Google had received 1135 court orders for 18,929 pieces of information and 2511 other requests for 5808 pieces of information from countries across the world. India itself has put in 16 court orders for 42 pieces of information and 147 other requests for 672 pieces of information.

FREEDOM ON THE NET REPORT 2013 – INDIA:

According to the report published by Freedom House (Period May 2012 – Apr 2013) India had 13% Internet penetration in the year 2012, there were social media / ICT apps that were reported to be blocked, political and social content was reported as blocked, bloggers / ICT users were arrested. India was declared as Partly Free on the internet as compared to many nations which are free. The total score for freedom on the net was 47 out of 100, where 1 is the best and 100 is the worst (this has been derived from 3 parameters obstacles to access content {15 out of 25}, Limits on content {12 out of 35} and Violations of user rights {20 out of 40}).

Some of the key highlights of the report for India are as follows:

- Hundreds of blocks, supposedly targeting inflammatory content, affected a wide range of pages, including some in the public interest.
- At least eleven people were charged under Section 66 of the 2008 IT Act amendment for posts on social media.
- Cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was arrested for anti-corruption cartoons, initially on charge of sedition, which carries a life sentence.
- The Central Monitoring System, partly in place since April 2013, seeks to equip a range of agencies to monitor any electronic communication in real time, without informing the target or a judge.
- Online campaigning for women's rights in the wake of a brutal sexual assault promoted street protests and some legislative reforms. (Freedom house report - http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2013/india#.UxFNW-OSyiQ accessed on March 1, 2014)

The above discussions about legal provision to control content on the internet and laws prevailing in India, clearly states that there is a strong government intervention in controlling content on the internet. Also representation of social voice is missing in the process of governance of internet control and enforcement of cyber laws in India.

VI. WAY FORWARD

India has subscribed to a thought of free press with certain restrictions keeping in mind the fundamental rights of the citizens of India. There is no doubt that the widespread development of Internet has exposed the young surfers to many social challenges. This is a sensitive area. India has also seen the evils of censorship during emergency time, and government itself working as the sole watchdog of content is surely not favourable for a country like India. Control over content on the internet can be addressed in multiple ways as described below:

1. Self Censorship: Each individual while uploading content must consider its impact on society. The Department of Electronics and Information Technology needs to come up with a code of conduct for content, which any website owner needs to adhere to for uploading content.
2. Formation of Apex Body: For Censoring, content government itself is not enough. There has to be a body which is created of representatives from all aspects of society viz. Education, media, social science, art, science, judiciary, commerce, industry and IT. This body could have multiple offices at state level. This body needs to have a legally enforceable entity. It must be notified to all users of internet that they could lodge their complaints about objectionable content on a particular website which this apex body has an access to. The apex body should address these complaints.
3. Research and Development: This Apex body should be involved in studying the trends of Internet Laws and Practices across the world and then recommending the same to the Government of India.
4. International Representation: This Apex body should join hands with research initiatives like Open Net Initiative, and constantly improve the state of Internet freedom and help build a constructive society.

India is developing at a fast pace and challenges of Internet must be addressed to ensure we achieve a constructive social growth.

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