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Digital Consumption Pattern and its Impact on Society: A Study on Semi-Urban Society of Odisha, India

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ABSTRACT

The covid–19 outbreak has changed the social lifestyle of the people significantly. The way people work, they way behave and communicate in the society has changed a lot. All have become more used to online activities and online transactions, during the pandemic spell. The digital dependence and consumption have grown significantly, during last two years, in each country. Many studies, on digital consumption pattern of users located at major cities, confirm this. But there are less studies or literature on the status of internet use in rural areas. Has there been similar growth, or it has much more diversity in the hinterlands, in smaller townships?

Against this background, this paper aims to study the digital consumption pattern and socio-psychological impacts of internet users, during pandemic, in smaller cities, categorized as tier 3, 4, and 5 (or with population of less than 50,000). It studies the digital consumption pattern and diversity and socio-psychological impact, in the context of semi-urban areas of Odisha, in India.

People from the semi-urban areas, as the paper finds, have more or less similar purpose of use and pattern of use. However, they feel, as paper finds, that prevalence of adult content in internet disturbs social life.

Keywords: Digital diversity, digital consumption, digital society, socio-psychological impacts, digital dependence, Semi–urban areas.

Introduction

Earlier the meaning of the word 'literacy' was, 'the ability to understand, interpret, communicate, identify and compute'. But in accordance with time, the meaning of the term literacy got changed. When we talk about literacy, the first thing that comes into our mind is the concept of 'digital literacy'. In that context, discussion on digital divide carries more academic importance than literary or even economic divides. The policy makers have taken this more seriously particularly in the context of under developed and developing countries like India, during this covid–19 pandemic. During the lockdown and shutdowns, when the government and local bodies wanted to reach out electronically to helpless rural poor and migrants to help them with financial assistance, it was then felt that the individuals who really needed the financial assistance, are digitally excluded. During the complete shutdown, when mobility was strictly restricted, it was really challenging situation for the administration to reach out the needy people mostly from the provincial regions.

But we have a high growth of active smartphone users and internet users, total reported to be close to 600 million and 700 million respectively in India (*India's growing data usage, smartphone adoption to boost Digital India initiatives: Top bureaucrat - The Economic Times*, 2021) [8]. Though things look bright in metros and bigger cities, still, advantages of the official internet-based portals and applications has not reached the masses, especially in the semi urban rural India. Because of better network facility,

online education has gradually become successful in bigger towns and metros. Recent report suggests majority of students (over 70%) preferring online education to physical mode, even today (*Over 70% Students In Capital Opt For Online Mode Of Examination | Bhubaneswar News - Times of India*, February, 2022) [12], but things are just opposite in rural and semi urban areas where majority students face technical difficulties of online education, because of want of proper electronic device. Thus, students of those areas as a contrast, prefer going back to physical mode of education. This glaring example of digital divide warrants a detail study of the issue.

Digital consumption has increased significantly during this long spell of pandemic lockdown period, in each country. Work–from–home and work–for–home has turned into the new normal. Classes for students now means only the online classes. Shopping for the household now termed as online shopping or e–tailing. As we have moved from physical world to an e–world, it is pertinent to know if the internet consumption pattern has also changed in rural area and smaller cities (categorized as tier 3, 4, and 5)? How diverse is the internet use pattern, among different categories of users of those areas?

It warrants an in-depth academic empirical study, to understand and analyse the associated impacts. This paper, first reviews related literature and conducts an empirical study, in selected areas of Odisha, India.

Literature Review

Numerous literatures are available on investigation of digital consumption pattern across diversified generations, also on its impact. Researches are found on challenges and opportunities of digital technology on cultural diversity. The digital technology acts as an open door in chain of production, distribution and consumption. The authors incorporate entertainment world and book industry to test the impact of digital technology in five nations: Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Spain based on social contrasts. They have also concentrated on benefits and drawbacks related with online advertisements. The individuals who have believe on website that internet makes them brand cognizant. They can without much of a stretch remind the brand names posed through inquiries by authors and others give more rating on ads seen through TV and magazines. The internet-based networks are the wellsprings of virtual connections, which assume huge part in recognizing the need of internet-clients and they offer emotional support to them.

Bisen and Deshpande (2018) have examined on both positive and negative perspectives related with internet, which is useful for communication and learning. While at the same time the over dependence on internet welcomes mental turmoil. “Internet has enough power to run and control the entire organization by focusing on storing, transmitting and retrieving data. It influences the perception of members of organization and helps to enhance knowledge with updated information. Internet has converted the old organizational system with new organizational set up and new technology.”

Boulay et al (2014) found on preferences of youngsters (younger than twelve) in regards to shopping from both online and retail stores and their benefits and detriments. They observe that kids from six to twelve years of age prefer brick and mortar stores or offline retail stores, as these comprise off wide range of items and instant gratification. Online retail stores currently likewise embrace this procedure immediately in conveyance of items and with cutthroat costs. The new Generation (5G) is always connected with internet for adaptable method of communication.

People of various ages love to listen variety of music and internet games are exceptionally famous in young generation. Rosenbaum and Wong (2012) had studied on instant messaging, its advantage and adverse consequence on mental well-being state of young adults. Internet is entirely reasonable and need of time for youth. By involving with internet for more times they are addicted and going through a terrible state of mind which likewise impacts the society. As per literature (Griffiths, 2010), internet plays crucial role in working environment as organizations are subject to it, however the addiction and abuses happened because of most extreme utilization of internet can increase working environment related issues. Basically, young generations during office hours are occupied with web-based shopping, diagramming exploitation of friendship and relation (internet abuses) can’t be disregarded. The vast majority of youths invest their free time or leisure with internet and to eradicate boredom there is intensive use of internet and gradually they are in the trap of it which hampers them psychologically. “The young generation are easily converted to SNSs addiction from IT addiction due to technological advancement and high speed of internet.” Video games or online games are extremely well known among individuals rather than conventional games which depend on physical fitness. Simultaneously, traditional games like: soccer, ball and so on are likewise played through internet which attract mass. They feel forlornness, uneasiness and depression with poor access of internet

as they consider internet as their closest companion and addiction is hazardous for their physical and mental development. This study is conducted in Poland by taking 505 number of high school students and the investigation is done with ANOVA technique. The students' academic performance is likewise low as a result of maximum time spent in internet rather than studies. The digital communication using smartphones vigorously impact the adults as they have virtual association of friends and it also makes distance of adults from their family members. They have also discussed about the issues related with young people while making online shopping. This study depends on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Internet provides adequate opportunities for improvement of kids at one side and issues related it with another side. They also focused on the significant role of guardians in beating overcoming internet addiction among youngsters. This study is based on secondary data analysis

Chen, Chen and Yang (2008) have studied on addiction of internet in working environment and internet abuses in industries. Both confidence and locus of control of personality traits play crucial role in misuse of internet or abuses in the work environment. The authors likewise infer that organizations should focus on effective internet policies and the conduct of employees in the organisation should be monitored to control the workplace deviant behaviour. They have distinguished that work fulfilment is positively influenced by emotional stability, consciousness and agreeableness and these have negative impact on internet addiction behaviour. Internet dependence is a major issue for adults. Web based games create internet addictiveness in young generation of China and the academic performance is impacted adversely. 'Internet is helpful in providing accuracy in estimation of corruption, creates awareness towards where to report on corruption and acts as an anti-corruption tool' [5].

Paul and Thompson (2017) found that cultural biasness is a solid hindrance to progress of ladies and proposes middle class Indian ladies can be empowered and employed with the assistance of accessibility of internet or digital technology which would give them affordable education and scope of employment. Opinion | Digitally empowering women in rural India (2018) studied on contribution of internet towards rural India. Digital technology like: access of internet by mobile phone which is reasonable for women of rural area and they can undoubtedly get information of all over the planet and mindful of the current circumstance [11]. Chakraborty (2018) studied on the main obstructions like: discrimination on the basis of gender, education, community and culture. The author also recommends that internet is useful to protect them from such sorts of inequalities and improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. Internet or digital technology makes a bridge in between Personal and Professional life of working women, but it is not completely free from threats or issues. Keeping up with harmony is difficult because of cultural diversity across countries while working in the MNCs and accessibility of internet sometimes bring various sorts of threats like abuses to women. Women are constantly dependent to threats of harassment, blackmail, cyberstalking through online. Online brutality and abuses are increasing towards women.

MacAya et al.(2021) studied the gendered differences while using the e – government services. They investigated that, while using the internet there is no gender differences. But when the time come for using e – government services there is a significant gap among the genders. In their study the authors had also examined that all the surveyed e – government services except those related to publications are dependent on gender.

MacAya (2021) studied the relationship of caste with digital divide. In this study the author has taken the hypothesis that the old and new ICT is spreading differently among members of different caste of Pakistan like; old caste and new caste. With the adaptation micro level data, the author explored the association between the ICT diffusion, type and sociocultural interaction. Also, with the help of data mining, found that digital divides are related to caste levels, which means old and new technology spread differently among the different caste. The author therefore concluded that the diffusion of ICT is not caste neutral.

Ghobadi and Ghobadi (2013) in their study explained the interaction and contribution of the four different access gaps; motivational gap, material gap, skills gap and usage gap to digital divide. They have investigated those Motivational factors such as 'Lack of interest in IT – related things', 'Lack of motivation to learn recent technology', and 'Motivation to get access to ICT, Access factors such as 'Access to ICT', Skill factors such as 'Operating skills', 'Anti filtering skills' and 'Not having IT background' and Usage factors such as 'Active use of ICT' have a major contribution in the digital divide (Ghobadi, 2013).

Subudhi (2021) studied the changing consumption pattern, the digital consumption diversity and the way it impacted the 'socio-psychologically', in Indian context and also discussed the issues of 'sustainability and equity, with respect to 'digital society'. In his study he found that social media (SM) plays a significant role addressing to the social inclusion issue of older adults and senior

citizens (together comprising of around 12% of net-users' sample data). As expected, young mass (within age group of 18-40 years) forms the major chunk of net-users (around 80% of target population).

Objective and Scope

Scope of this present study is to understand the dependence and pattern of internet uses in smaller townships of Odisha, in eastern India. Research objective is to study the digital diversity and societal impact of internet use in semi-urban society. Objective is also to understand awareness level of those users on several features and security options of various social media.

Research Methodology

Scope of this present study is to understand the digital consumption pattern and socio-psychological impact on different categories of internet users, in semi-urban areas of Odisha, located in Eastern India. Study period was February–October, 2021, during COVID pandemic, where people were almost confined to their homes, with partial restrictions on mobility and outside gatherings.

This study adopts an empirical survey research method, taking a multi-stage convenient sample from four different geographical regions of Odisha (in India), especially the semi-urban areas and the cities categorized as tier–3, 4 and 5 (with a total population of less than 50,000). A structured, close-ended questionnaire was used for survey, and anybody using an internet-based smartphone was considered to be eligible as a respondent.

Following section gives the details of sampling plan. It has been categorized into four geographical regions of Odisha.

Here the Central-Odisha region includes Khordha, Nayagarh, Chandpur, Odogaon, Pipili, Banki, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Jatni, Kendrapada. North-Odisha region comprises of Keonjhar, Chandipur (in Balasore), Baripada, Bhadrak, Jaleswar, Keonjhar. South-Odisha region includes Aska, Bhanjanagar, Gopalpur and Parlakhemundi. And the Western-Odisha region includes Bargarh, Burla, Jharsuguda, Jyoti vihar, Attabira, Banei, and Sohela.

A structured questionnaire was canvassed through trained investigators in above mentioned places (small townships), in physical mode. Collected primary data, after editing and coding, were analysed by using standard statistical software (SPSS v-27).

Data analysis

A structured questionnaire was canvassed through trained investigators and primary data collected, using standard scales of measurement. Out of the total respondents of 235 'internet users', 48.94% were female, around 14.04% of respondents were of age of 41 years and above. 77.45% of respondents were unmarried, mostly young 'students' category (68.51%), who used internet most often. Following tables (table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5), give the detail break-up of demographic profile of sample respondents.

The above table – 1.1 represents the different age group of the total sample. Majority of the respondents are from the 18 - 40 years (i.e. 73.62%) as our target is to focus the young generation because their consumption pattern of digital media is very high. The number of respondents of age group of <18 years and 41- 60 years approximately same (12.34% and 11.91% respectively). Most of the people >60 years not that much tech savvy, so here the percentage is very low i.e. 2.13%.

The table – 1.2 shows that male respondents and female respondents have participated almost equally in this study, where the percentage of participation of male respondents is 51.06% and female respondents is 48.94%.

The above table (Table – 1.3) represents the marital status of the respondents as we have focused the

Table 1 Sample Size

LOCATION	Respondents
Central Odisha	63
North Odisha	30
South Odisha	61
Western Odisha	81
Grand Total (Sample size)	**235**

Table 1.1. Age of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
<18 years	29	12.34%
18– 40 years	173	73.62%
41– 60 years	28	11.91%
> 60 years	5	2.13%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 1.2. Gender

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	120	51.06%
female	115	48.94%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 1.3. Marital Status

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	162	77.45%
Married	50	21.28%
Others	2	1.28%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 1.4. Profession

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Student	161	68.51%
Service	34	14.47%
Homemaker	13	5.53%
Business	24	10.21%
Others	3	1.28%
Total	**235**	**100%**

younger generation (18-40 years), maximum of the respondents are unmarried i.e. 77.45% . Rest 21.28% respondents are married and only 1.28% respondents are of the other category. Here other category represents engaged, separated, widow etc.

The data in this table (table – 1.4) consist of respondents of different profession. Maximum respondents are students (68.51%). 14.47% belong to service holders. 10.21% are business men, 5.53 % are homemakers. Only 1.28% come on other categories which represents retired personnel.

Above table (table -1.5) portrays the years of experience of the respondents of using the internet. Maximum respondents (44.39%) have the experience of 1- 5 years. 33.17% respondents mentioned, they have been using the internet in the past 5-10 years. Whereas 19.62% said they have been using internet since a long i.e. more than 10 years. Only 2.80% of respondents mentioned that they have been using from the last year and from last few months.

One of the first question was to know, how they connect to internet, that is, the connection source. As shown in Table-2, majority (94.04%) connected through personal mobile data pack.

Table 1.5. Years using internet

Category	Frequency	Percentage
⇐ 1 year	9	2.80%
1 – 5 year	109	44.39%
5 – 10 year	74	33.17%
>10 year	43	19.62%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 2. Connection source/ medium: how they connect to internet.

Connection Source	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Mobile Data	221	94.04%
Broadband Connection	44	18.72%
Shared Wi-Fi	64	27.23%
Public Wi-Fi	26	11.06%

[Percentages are calculated by dividing respective frequencies by 235, the sample size.]

Table 3. Purpose of use of internet

Purpose of use	Frequency	%
a. Entertainment	206	87.66%
b. Communication	218	92.77%
c. Video conferencing	79	33.62%
d. Education	140	59.57%
e. Work & Research	154	65.53%
f. Personal Finance	83	35.32%
g. Current Events	146	62.13%
h. Online Booking	117	49.79%
i. Online Shopping	172	73.19%
j. Video-Audio download	146	62.13%

[Percentages are calculated by dividing respective frequencies by 235, the sample size.]

Next, we wanted to know the purpose of using internet. As given in Table-3, most preferred purpose of uses is, for communication (92.77%), for entertainment (87.66%) and for online shopping (73.19%).

Figure-1 depicts the frequency/ cases of net-users (respondents), who exhausted/ exceeded daily data-limit of their net pack. Scales are: 1=not exceeded, 2=exceeded, 3=sometimes and 4=many times exceeded. It shows, many people (63%) had exceeded (when cases are added up). Next we asked if adult contents (pornography sites), which are largely available, would disturb our social life/ relation? As shown in Fig.-2, majority (code 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=can't say, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) agreed, that yes, it would disturb. Figure-3, was a question to understand the 'urge to check net, even late at night'. Many

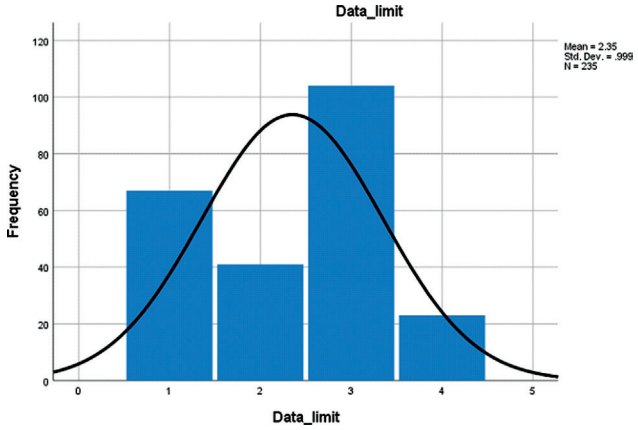

Figure 1. Data limit per day.

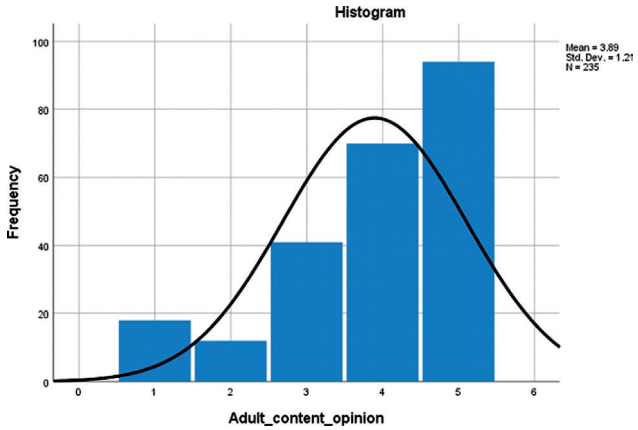

Figure 2. If adult contents would disturb society.

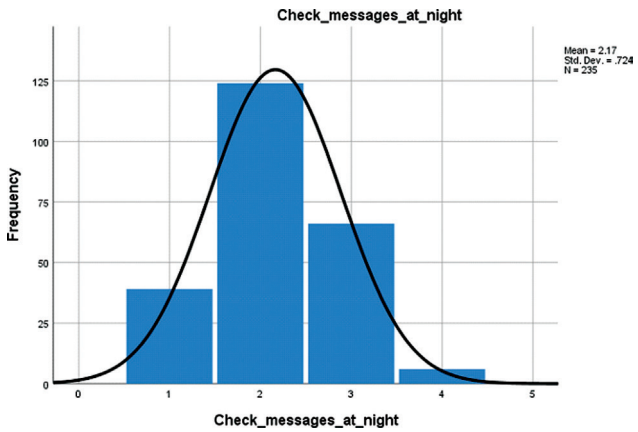

Figure 3. Do you check net, at late-night?

respondents indicated, in conformity. Table-4 is on the proportion of users, who actually knew 'use of privacy settings' while using social media. As the sample is mostly comprised of young students and job seekers, majority of the respondents had 'idea on privacy settings.

Next two questions were related to 'psycho-social inclusion of senior citizens'. Table-5, is on the proportion of respondents who agreed (68.51%) that, yes, 'loneliness

Table 4. If privacy settings known

Do you know?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	179	76.17%
No, I don't feel it's important	34	14.47%
Don't know about privacy setting	22	9.36%
Total	235	100%

Table 5. Loneliness felt by senior citizens

	Frequency	Percentage
Can't say / Don't know	42	17.87%
Strongly disagree	32	13.62%
Somewhat agree	93	39.57%
Strongly agree	68	28.94%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 6. Getting emotional support

	Frequency	Percentage
Can't say / Don't know	55	23.40%
Strongly disagree	21	8.94%
Somewhat agree	115	48.94%
Strongly agree	44	18.72%
Total	**235**	**100%**

Table 7. Adult content opinion versus age

		Age		
		⇐40	>40	Total
Adult content opinions	Strongly Disagree	18	0	18
	Disagree	10	2	12
	Can't Say	40	1	41
	Agree	59	11	70
	Strongly Agree	75	19	94
Total		**202**	**33**	**235**

was an issue with senior citizens', as they don't get sufficient attention (or engagement). Table-6 depicts the agreement by majority of respondents (67.66%), regarding the 'usefulness of social media (SM), where senior citizens get emotional support in virtual world'.

Hypothesis 1. (H1). In smaller cities, the both age group (<40 and >40) has same opinion about adult content.

Table – 7 shows that maximum respondents (69.78%) of the semi urban areas are agreed that the adult contents disturb their social life/relation.

To test the hypothesis- 1 we have done the t – test. The result (Table-8) suggests p value is 0.02, which is less

Table 8.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	40.4	6.6
Variance	742.3	67.3
Observations	5	5
Pooled Variance	404.8	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Degree of freedom	8	
t Stat	2.65	
P(T⇐t) one-tail	0.014	
t Critical one-tail	1.85	
P(T⇐t) two-tail	0.03	
t Critical two-tail	2.31	

Table 9. Cross-tabulation: Senior citizens loneliness vs Age

		Age				Total
		<18	18-40	41-60	>60	
Senior citizens loneliness	Can't say	10	31	1	0	42
	Strongly disagreed	4	24	3	1	32
	Somewhat agree	9	65	15	4	93
	Strongly agree	6	53	9	0	68
Total		**29**	**173**	**28**	**5**	**235**

than 0.05 (taking 5% significance level). So, it is found significant. Thus, the null hypothesis will be rejected. So it can be concluded that in the smaller cities the opinion of people less than the age group of 40 and above 40 is different about adult content. Which shows all the people in the semi urban cities are not conservative. Some of them are comfortable with the adult content.

Bi-variate Data Analysis

We have studied 'statistical significance' of possible association/ dependence of a few inter-related factors, by using Pearson Chi-square tests.

Hypothesis 2. (H1). Age group has an association with thinking process about the senior citizens loneliness.

Table -9 gives the bi variate table, showing 'very high frequency' of such 'thinking process about senior citizen loneliness', only for 'young adults', within age group of 18 – 40 years. And maximum respondents (93+68) agreed that senior citizens after retirements, they feel loneliness at their home. But in chi – square test the p value found to be greater than 0.05 (at 5% significance level) i.e. 0.079. Thus 'Age' has no significant' relation/ association with thinking process about the senior citizens.

Table 10. Cross-tabulation: Senior citizens loneliness vs Marital Status:

		Marital Status			Total
		Single	Married	Others	
Senior citizens loneliness	Can't say	39	2	1	42
	Strongly disagreed	27	4	1	32
	Somewhat agree	67	26	0	93
	Strongly agree	49	18	1	68
Total		182	50	3	235

Table 11. Cross-tabulation: Senior citizens loneliness vs Profession:

		Profession					Total
		Student	Service	Home-makers	Professional/ Business	Others	
Senior citizens loneliness	Can't say	34	3	1	3	1	42
	Strongly disagreed	24	2	2	4	0	32
	Some-what agree	55	21	6	9	2	93
	Strongly agree	48	8	4	8	0	68
Total		**161**	**34**	**13**	**24**	**3**	**235**

Hypothesis 3. (H1). Marital status has an association with thinking process about the senior citizens

Following bi-variate table (Table-10) gives data on thinking process about senior citizens loneliness by respondents of different marital status. As the data shows, and as the significance (chi-square) test verifies the p value i.e. 0.03 is less than 0.05(5 % significance level), thus it can be concluded "Thinking process about senior citizens loneliness" is associated with "marital status".

Hypothesis 4. (H1). Profession has an association with senior citizenship loneliness.

Cross-tabulation was done to check (data in Table -11), if there is any significant relationship between 'profession' and 'thinking process about the senior citizens'. Generally the working professional go to the workplaces in their working hours. They can't give time to their parents who are retired and staying at home. That's why we wanted to test statistically that profession has association with the senior citizens loneliness with the help of cross

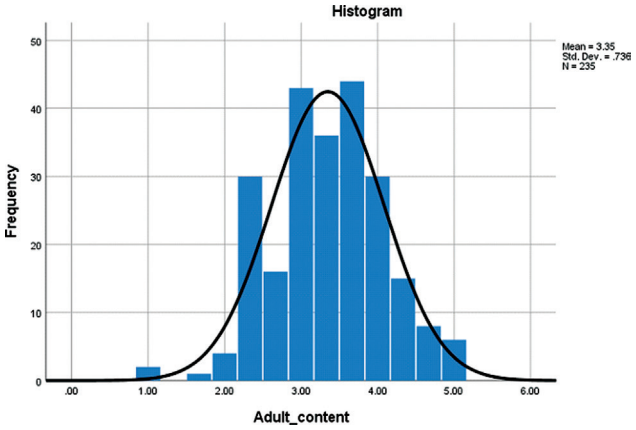

Figure 4. Adult Content Opinion.

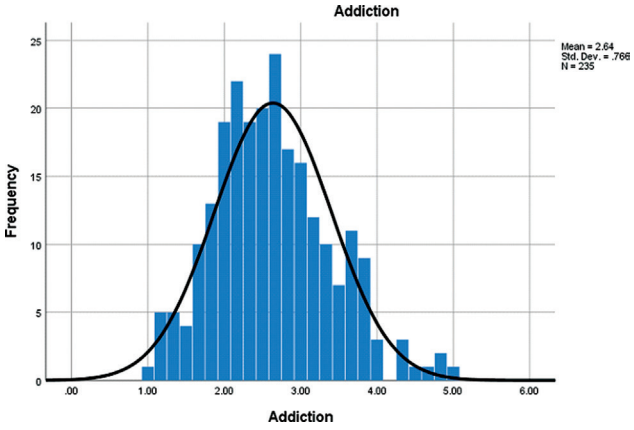

Figure 5. Addiction.

tabulation. But as per availability of data, it could not be found/established to be significant, as 'p' value found 0.30 (30%), exceeded 0.05 (as tested at 5% significance level).

The above histogram (Figure – 4) shows more frequencies on agreement side (towards right). This implies majority of the respondents from small towns feel prevalence of adult content in internet will disturb their own social life and relation. The Figure – 5 represents that more frquenies are on the disagreement side (towards left), which indicates, the respondents from smaller towns of odisha do not feel that they are addicted, they do not feel like, "they spend too much time as told by others", "they feel very much uneasy, when they are without internet for sometime", "they feel restless and irritated, when their messages remain un-read / un-replied", "they feel that they are spending longer periods of time online", "sometimes, they skipped / forgotten their meals, because of using intenet", "going online is the first thought they have, when they wake up in the morning".

Conclusion

In our study we have found that maximum number of people depend on personal mobile data than the other sources. Their main purpose of using internet is communication and entertainment. Our study shows that a large number of respondents (63%) mentioned that they have exceeded their daily data limit, which shows the higher utilization of internet data. So it can be concluded that like Tier-1 and tier 2 cities, also in the cities of tier 3, 4, 5 cities and in semi-urban areas the consumption of the internet has increased significantly, during this pandemic period. If we talk about the technical knowledge like, awareness on privacy-settings, maximum respondents (76.17%) are aware of it, which shows that the technical knowhow in those areas is also increasing. This study finds that the digital connectivity has become an emotional support to the senior citizens who stay more confined at home. This has been accepted by maximum number of respondents (over 67%).

The other important finding of the study is that the people from the small towns and semi-urban areas feel that prevalence of adult content in internet will disturb their own social life and relation. But it is found that most of the internet users of semi-urban areas don't feel that they are addicted towards internet.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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