INTERNSHIP PROJECT WITH THE KERALA STATE PLANNING BOARD

SOCIAL MEDIA- A TOOL FOR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FOR ENHANCING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE PANCHAYATS OF KERALA

By

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Importance of Kerala in Decentralised Planning with People's Participation

Kerala's decentralized planning that followed the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and enabling enactments in the State in 1994. To operationalise decentralisation, Kerala chose the path of participatory local level planning as the entry point. This succeeded to a considerable extent in harnessing public action in favour of decentralisation. In order to push the system and force the process a campaign approach was followed for decentralised planning - known as the 'People's Planning Campaign'. This campaign created a powerful demand factor for decentralisation to be guided along the right path. To a large degree the campaign succeeded in setting the agenda for decentralisation. It has brought the governance closer to the people. There has been an effective change in Village Panchayats by active people's participation representing all stakeholders in Gram Sabhas. The direct involvement of people in planning and beneficiary selection has been pivotal to people's planning.

This led to the changing living standards of the people. Today kerala is top and known as "Kerala Model Development" in terms of Women Empowerment through initiating kudumbshree, Akshaya Centres and Women Component Plan, high female literacy, high female representation in higher education, low rates of maternal and child mortality and high life expectancy and nutrition standards of children, support for special children, quality of education facility, open society accepting differences, conservation of environment through active youth organizations etc.

1.1 The Trend of change in People's Participation

The overwhelming higher participation rates of people in the gram sabhas has been a proud movement for the State of Kerala across India till recent times. But as per various research reports and opinions of experts in Local Governments pointed out that the people's participation level is slowly going towards trough conditions. Before people's planning campaign the things or scenarios of village panchayats were completely different from present, majority of people were in dire status to get the basic facilities. But as the things changed especially in Socio-Economic development of people where individuals or families turning out into better life, youth migrating

for better employment and better education, urban culture expansion in villages, ideological differences or political attachments.

The Recent literature and media reports are rich in observations shows the trend of declining participation of people, particularly those belonging to the middle classes and the relatively better off sections, needs to be viewed with concern as the State has a history of very active civil society movements in which the participation of intermediate classes was significant. Those classes in fact, had leadership roles in many such movements. Their withdrawal from the public sphere can have other implications also. Those relatively better off sections with their advantageous position in the socio-economic and educational fields can be expected to provide qualitative input to local planning and developmental activities. Hence, their withdrawal implies considerable social cost (Pillai & C.Prakash, 2016).

To improve the quality of Gram Sabhas Participation and bring back active people's participation there should be a platform for the people across the sections in Panchayats to connect and discuss with their elected representatives and officials of Panchayat. This platform could be Social Media, where the elected representatives could reach out to the different spheres. It will substantially improve the relation between elected representatives and people. The common platform helps the stakeholders to discuss amongselves for the development of Village. There are several examples from kerala, where Panchayat Presidents and ward members interacted with Non Resident Keralities through social media and made them to be part of Gram Sabha through virtual media. All these enables towards the participatory development.

1.2 About Social Media-

Social Media has made a revolution across the world for its connectiveness, sharing opinions freely, enhancing communication with the like-minded people, motivating citizens in providing support during disasters and many more. Apart from this Social Media has been used for improving in Governance of the Administration by involving people in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the projects. It has given space for all stakeholders to interact directly with the leaders or administration in specifying their grievances, this made the representatives to work on completing the task as whole population is watching about its completion.

1.3 Digitization Level in Kerala:

Aside from all the digitization challenges faced by India, Kerala has chalked out a trailblazing path for other states to learn from. Kerala has 37% Internet penetration according to reports (98% of connected rural users' men; 79% from the city: report, 2016). Another report in 2015 (Data Shows Kerala is Well Ahead of Other States in e-matters, 2015) states Kerala has the highest mobile penetration with more than 30 million connections for a population of 33 million, with a rapid increase in the usage of smart phones. It also has high Internet penetration, covering about 20 per cent of the households through broadband and another 15 per cent through mobile, as per the TRAI's (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) latest figures. (Paul & Pillai, May 2017)
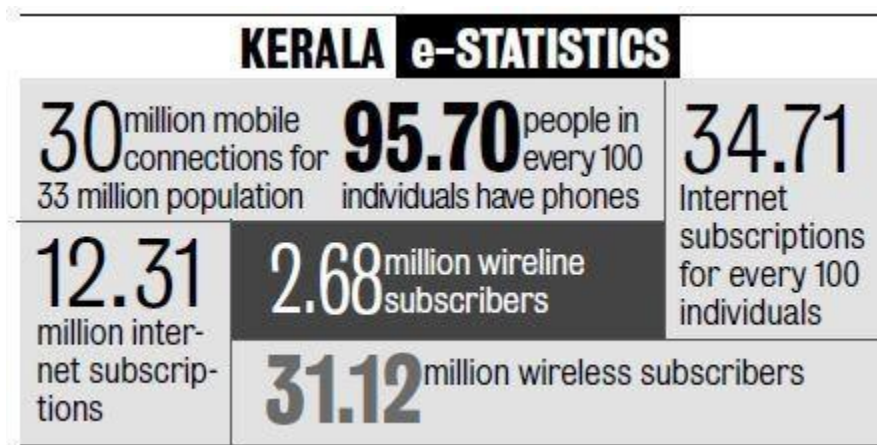

Image 1.1: Statistical data of internet usage in Kerala. Src: The New Indian Express (http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2015/aug/08/Data-Shows-Kerala-is-Well-Aheadof-Other-States-in-e-matters-796453.html)

1.3 Utilisation of Social Media by Village Panchayats for active people's participation:

For local governments, social media can help initiate development changes where actually needed. Social Media as a systematic listening tool, allowing not only to iniatiate dialogue, but also to conduct public opinion research, consult citizens to design development projects, and share results. The outcome of this is optimum utilization of limited resources and meeting people's real aspirations for reforms in a transparent manner, thus directly ensuring governments to gain better political mileage. As Kerala has good digital connectivity in rural villages, penetration of social media is increasing among different age groups for various purposes. Local Self Government Department of Kerala recently directed the LSG bodies to ensure wider participation of people in the Grama Sabha and use social media as effective tool for their participation.
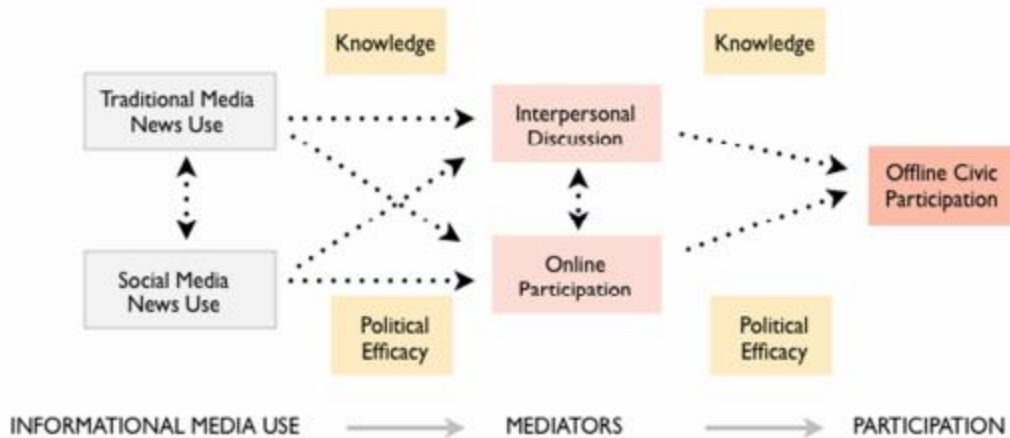
Image 1.2: Theorised Pathways to civic participation

Source: (Bokai, Forero, Garces, Peralta, & Shieh, 2013)

1.4 Justification of the Study

This study mainly aimed to look insights for the usage of social media by the Elected Representatives or Village Panchayats to promote citizen participation especially in issues related to governance. It mainly emphasizes how social media could be a catalyst in filling the gap between the Panchayat and Citizens especially youth, women, and weaker sections of the Panchayat. The study also shows how social has tried to brought innovative changes through active citizens participation in implementation of various government schemes or voluntary activities. It majorly shows how the social media made elected representatives. Kerala is in second phase of People's Planning and it wants to ensure the active participation of the people in Gram Sabhas, social media plays the major role.

1.5 Objectives:

1. To know whether the elected representatives are using social media for dissemination of Information
2. To know whether the people's participation is happening through Social Media.
3. To know whether the elected representatives are able to utilize the discussions happening in the social media.

1.6 Methodology:

Two Village Panchayats Karakulam and Vembayam has been selected from the Thiruvanthapuram District. As both these Panchayats are nearby Trivandrum city, an attempt has made to know how the Panchayats and Elected Representatives are using social media for seeking active people's participation. The study consists of qualitative research conducted with Random sampling of 15 Elected Representatives of both Village Panchayats.

Semi Structured Interview has been conducted for getting the opinions of Ward Elected Representatives. Similarly Semi Structured Interview has been conducted for Village Panchayat President how the Panchayat is utilizing the social media for the Panchayat Development.

1.7 Limitation:

The Socio-Economic changes of the both Village Panchayat comparing 1996(before First People's Campaign) to 2018(Second People's campaign) couldn't be gathered as data was unavailable. This data could have helped in understanding why the people's has been decreased in Gram Sabhas. The Sample Size of research was very less as the majority of ward elected representatives were not able at Panchayat Office during the conduct of interview. This has limited to get the wider view of usage of social media. Most Important constraint was Malayalam language, as the researcher couldn't ask or approach different respondents freely.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study explores local government use of social media tools, particularly for the purposes of enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency. The literature reviewed explores why and how local governments employ social media to interact with citizens, and how government use of social media may be assessed and improved.

2.1 Social Media and Its Importance:

Social media provides a newly emerging mechanism for engaging a large and diverse group of participants, including individuals or groups that might otherwise be hard to reach or to bring together (Bacon, 2009; Fine, 2006). Social media also provide a forum for discussion that has important differences from face-to-face interactions. With social media, all participants have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion, responses need not be immediate, and time can be taken to review the thread of a discussion. Social media also provide opportunities to reframe questions as the discussion evolves (Connor, 2009).

In addition, social media can generate a discussion archive that is useful for revisiting opinions, information, and collective history. Furthermore, the manner in which social media are used by the community in the initial stages of engagement might be a barometer of the capacity to engage .that community and success in doing so, facilitating evaluation of community engagement.

Generally, depending on how groups communicate, a broader group of participants can be engaged using social media than through traditional means, facilitating the process of establishing collective positions and strategies. Specifically, social media can provide a forum for interaction and discussion about both draft and final position statements. Clearly, social media also play an important role in building and sustaining networks by facilitating ongoing communication, social exchange, and coordination of activities. Moreover, these media can help build trust by providing venues in which partners can demonstrate transparency and openness. Meeting agendas, minutes, handouts, and questions (and responses) can all be posted and viewed. (Bacon, 2009; Connor, 2009).

2.2 Social Media for community empowerment:

For communities to actively participate in governance they need more than just be aware of their roles and responsibilities. They need the intelligence and skills on how to carry on their responsibilities. Capacity building according to Eade (1997) is an ambiguous idea both in conceptualizing and implementing it. It is hard to point a widely accepted good practice framework either for citizens or those attempting to engage citizens (Epstein et al. 2002)., Okello et al, (2008) describe capacity building as consisting of developing knowledge, skills and operational capacity so that individual groups may achieve their purpose. Eade (1997) says that current thinking about capacity building is most influenced by concepts about participation, empowerment, civil society and social movements. She also argues that capacity building is influenced by ideas related to concerning participation, empowerment civil society and social movements. Eade(1997) says capacity building is illustrated by four examples of 'what it is not'. Capacity building should not mean creating a dependency in which we see government projects seeking to find most expedient ways of solving a particular problem. Capacity building should not also be deemed as weakness on the part of the government. Third, Eade (1997) says capacity building should not be a separate activity rather it is something done instead of providing services in areas such as health, welfare and education. (Stephen, 2012)

2.3 Social Media as a factor for Participatory Democracy in Local Governments:

Participatory democracy and new political understandings may also encourage local governments to use social media tools. Today, there is significant discontent with functioning of democracy. Low voter turnout and confidence crises in political institutions are seen as the symptoms of this disappointment (Putnam 1995; Berman 1997). Coleman and Gøtze (2001) asserted that many developed democracies experienced a loss of confidence in traditional democratic government models. To prevent and end the democratic legitimacy and accountability crisis, there is a need for a new type of relationship between citizens and governance institutions. In this context, representative democracy is criticized, and there are increases in participatory democracy. Although the idea that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the potential to improve democracy is not new, there has been a rise in current expectations from Internet-based technologies such as social media to materialize participatory democracy.

Chapter 3: A PROFILE OF STUDY AREA

1. **Karakulam Gram Panchayat:**

Image 3.1: Karakulam Panchayat Map

Source: http://lsgkerala.in/karakulampanchayat/

Karakulam Panchayat belongs to Nedumangadu Block Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district. It is a special grade Panchayat formed in 1953 with total geographical area of 25.1 Sq.KMs with 23 wards. North-East of Karakulam is bounded with Aruvikkara Panchayat. In the South East, the Panchayat shares border with Vattiyoorkavu Panchayat. Thiruvananthapuram Corporation lies in the West and Nedumangadu municipality and Vembayam Panchayats in the North West. Karakulam Panchayat is considered as one of the highly developed Panchayats with respect to E-governance in the district. Panchayat is situated very adjacent to the city. The structure of the population is as given below.

Population (2011 sensus)	52417
Men	25397
Women	27020
Voters	38326
Women Reserved Wards	12
SC Reserved wards	2

Table No 3.1: Population of Karakulam Panchayat

Source: Report of Karakulam Panchayat

Best in E-Governance:

Karakulam Panchayat is considered as a leading Panchayat in terms of the adoption of E-governance in Kerala. Even though the attempt for E-governance started in 2000 itself, its full fledged operation started only in 2006. At present not less than seven programmes of IKM's E-governance projects are being successfully implemented. They are Sulekha (for plan monitoring), Sevana (for civil service delivery), Sevana (for pension), Sankhya (for account and finance management), Stapana (for establishment administration) and Sanchaya (for revenue management).

Karakulam awarded back to back for its creative initiatives:

The Panchayat in 1998 , came up with the idea of training students for the burgeoning IT Job Market. This idea made to start Grameena Pathana Kendram(GPK), this initiative got the panchayat worldwide acclaim. Today the students of the panchayat who are part of GPK are preferred by Government and Private Institutions for various computer application jobs. The One-year animation course jointly conducted by the IITC and C-DIT has won acclaim among the big names in the industry. The centre made it to the headlines in 2004 when "Shadow of Light" a short film made by students undergoing the animation course, bagged the Portugese 'Avanca' award.

Another major activity of the GPK is the Participatory Resource Research and Training Centre(PARC). The mission is designed to support local government institutions in resource management, developmental planning and protection of the environment. (Staff Reporter, 2006)

Another project named Basic Education-Academi, Administrative and Management Aspects (BEAAM) focuses on improving the management and academic standards of schools under local self-government institutions.

In a major initiative, the panchayat had used its resources to make people between the age of 7 and 75 e-literate. As a step towards encouraging youngsters in taking up sporting events, the panchayat set up " Operation Olympia" at karakulam and Vattapara to sports training.
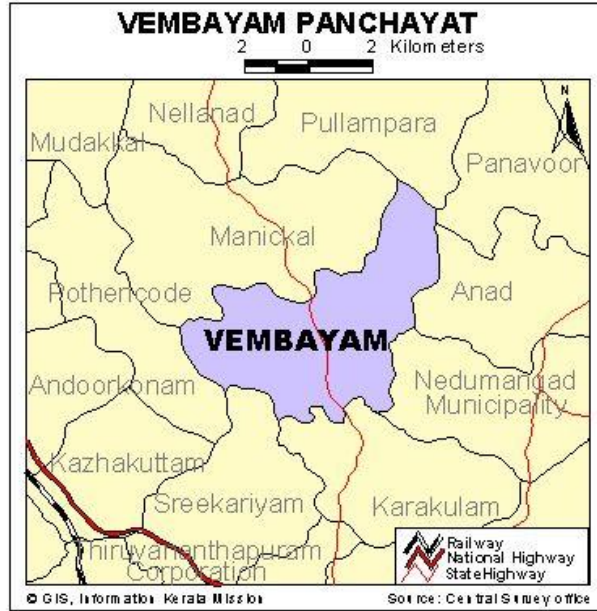
2. **Vembayam Village Panchayat:**

Image 3.2: Vembayam Village Panchayat Map

Source: http://lsgkerala.in/vembayampanchayat/photo-gallery/map/

Vembayam Village, with population of about 32 thousand is Nedumangad sub district's the 12th least populous village, located in Nedumangad sub district of Thiruvananthapuram district. Vembayam Panchayat has 21 wards with an area comprising 30.58 Sq.Km.

Population	32637
Male	16067
Female	16570
Sex Ratio	1031
Literacy Rate	88.09
Male(Literacy)	93.38
Female(Literacy)	82.99

Table No: 3.2 Population and Literacy Status of Vembayam

Source: http://lsgkerala.gov.in/pages/lb_general_info.php?intID=5&ID=267&ln=en

Vembayam has 35% (7154) population engaged in either main or marginal works. 55% male and 16% female population are working population. 47% of total male population are main (full time) workers and 8% are marginal (part time) workers. For women 10% of total female population are main and 6% are marginal workers.

Vembayam Recognised for different initiatives:

Vembayam is known for one of the few Village Panchayats to become fully completed the geoinformatics project. The idea was to use the latest technology for planning. Every pond, electric post, streetlight, house, person, animal and vacant land has been counted. This can be used while devising projects, as well as for various other uses.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter sets out the findings of a qualitative study of usage of Social Media by the Vembayam and Karakulam Village Panchayats for enabling citizen engagement and increasing government transparency. It also comprises a detailed study about how Elected Representatives in their wards are using social media tools for bringing out creative initiatives by discussing with the people, how people's response is there through this medium, whether it has benefitted in the development of ward.

Vembayam Village Panchayat

Duration of Village Panchayat Social Media: The Vembayam Panchayat has started Facebook Page before one Year.

Motto to Start:

As the Village Panchayat is nearby the City and to preserve the Village characteristics, the Village President and the team decided to have social media for an effective public relation.

Number of Memebers: The Vembayam Village Facebook Page has nearly 1500 citizens of panchayat part of it.

To Maintain the Social Media Facebook Page a separate Technical Staff is allocated to update and process the information regularly to the people.

How Panchayat Use Social Media:

The Village Panchayat has depicted several innovative initiatives on the social media page. The Information majorly concentrated on the page:

1. **Work carried out by Panchayat:**

i. The Panchayat posts Comprehensive Development Plans which have been introduced to provide comprehensive housing, settlement of drinking water supply, sanitation, animal husbandry, geriatrics welfare, women component schemes, and plastic disposal. This has been well responded by the citizens especially youth and elder people by giving your opinions on the Facebook.

ii. The rejuvenation of Water has been enormously concentrated in the social media page in last 1 year. There have been regular posts showing women NREGA workers constructing ponds for conservation of water in different wards. The President said women were inspired by seeing the traditional rain water harvesting techniques available in Youtube videos and started to work on it.

iii. Encouraging citizens to access the e-portals for paying bills, property taxes, enhancing awareness about Information Kerala Mission.

iv. Showing the achievements of the children, youth in Sports, Academics and other extra-curricular activities. The Village Panchayat has encouraged and awarded the achievers and encouraged the other parents to support children in their extracurricular activities.

v. Awarding the officials and elected representatives for carrying out the good work in the panchayat has been posted in Facebook page regularly to motivate the other officers to work sincerely and productively.

2. **Innovative and Empathetic Initiatives brought out by Panchayat through People's Response on Facebook and other social media platforms:**

i. The Panchayat has created a sports club group where children and youth encouraged to take part in events like Cricket, Kabaddi, Foot ball, Volley Ball etc. form teams in each ward and have regular tournaments.

ii. The Village Panchayat has initiated a Teacher's Bank where youth from the Village Panchayat will be recruited and placed in 7 Schools for getting teaching experience.

iii. Arts Festival was celebrated across village panchayat and social media played a major role in inviting special children or disabled children to the festival. The citizens in the facebook has appreciated the work of the panchayat and emphasized other panchayats to have similar initiative.

iv. Special Workshops have been conducted on the recommendation of people in Facebook and through several meetings. Haritha Keralam a Green Mission of Kerala, the panchayat has selected volunteers from the ward level provided training facilities to them. Also trainings for the Organic Farming, Honey-bee cultivation and best agricultural practices conducted for the women and farming community.

v. Health Awareness was continuously generated on the request of the people in social media and conducted Cancer awareness seminar for the people.

3. Change in Village Panchayat after Social Media entrance:

i.More Youth are interested to involve in the work of Village Panchayat by giving their regular opinions on facebook page.

ii. The Village administration has become active. As citizens are complaining if there is any matter of delay through posting their problems in Social media. It also helped administration for transformation of Information.

iii. 10 out of 21 Elected Representatives of wards are posting their work on Facebook Page, which is creating a competition environment in between different ward leaders for bringing innovative initiatives.

iv. People are ready to raise the claims and provide suggestions. Some citizens posted photographs of bad road conditions on social media and many people responded to it. The Village Panchayat has taken immediate action in making repairs and public works department brought out a toll free number for reporting these incidents.

<div align="center">

Karakolam Village Panchayat

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Duration of Village Panchayat Social Media: The Village Panchayat has Facebook page from past 3years but it is not active due to lack of regular updates. But the Panchayat has whatsapp groups for different purposes.

Motto to Start: The Village Panchayat has got a good name across the Country for its early unique IT initiative Grameena Padana Kendram, this activated the panchayat to use social media for having community engagement.

Utilization of Social Media by Panchayat:

1. Work carried out by Panchayat through Social Media:

i. As the Panchayat has huge population of nearly 70,000 transferring Information will be very difficult, The Panchayat use social media in making citizens to know about the proceedings of various meetings held in the panchayat for development activities.

ii. The Village Panchayat has 413 Units of Kudumbsree, to connect all these groups the Village Panchayat connected it through Whatsapp for easy way to seek support of them in development activities like Killiar Mission.

2. Initiatives Taken by Panchayat:

i. The Panchayat has initiated Buds School in some of the 43 Anganwadi Centres. Idea came through one of the discussion happened in the whatsapp group.

ii. Green Army has been formed by activating youth through youth club groups.

iii. Able to create to database for the youth unemployed in the different wards through social media and provide skill development facilities to these youth grameen padana kendram.

3. Change in Village Panchayat after Social media:

i. As per the President, Social Media has helped to get ideas from the community especially in the field of environment and agriculture.

ii. Reaching out easily to more women and youth for seeking opinions in the development plans.

iii. Managing Time by reaching out to large community at the same time.

Analysis of Elected Representatives Responses:

1. Gender of Elected Representatives:

Gender	No. of Elected Representative	Percentage
M	4	26.7
F	11	73.3
Total	15	100

Table No: 4.1 Total number of Elected Represntatives

As part of this study, Total 15 elected representatives has been selected from both Vembayam and Karakoram Village Panchayats. Majority (73%) of the elected representatives were Women and Remaining (27%) were Men. Both the Panchayats are headed by the Women Presidents and majority of the seats in both Village Panchayats are reserved for women.

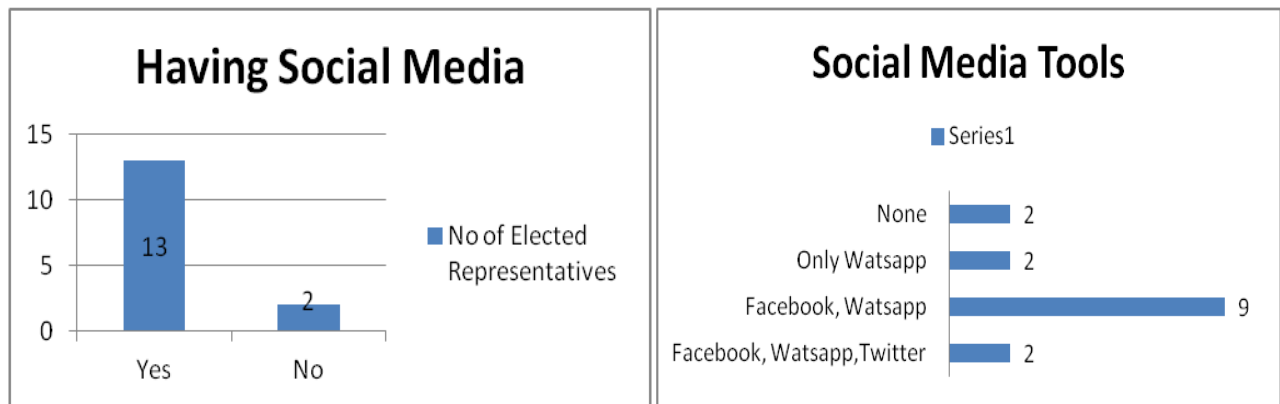2. **Elected Representatives in Social Media:**

Image 4.1 No.of ER in Social Media   Image 4.2: ER usage Social Media tools

Majority (13) of the Elected Representatives are having Social media accounts and remaining (2) representatives are not having accounts. Most of the Elected Representatives use whatsapp and Facebook as their social media tools and 2 Elected Representatives use 3 social media tools (watsapp, facebook, twitter). The elected representatives feel widely use Whatsapp as it easier way to communicate.

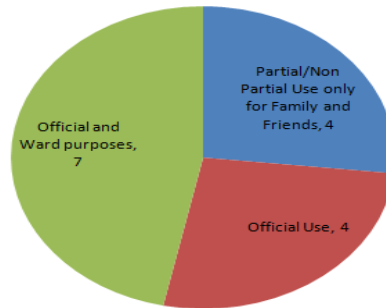3. **Purpose of Social Media Tools:**

Image 4.3: Purposes of Social Media use by Elected Representatives

Seven elected representatives are using social media tools for the Official and their ward development purposes mainly to interact with the community people. Four Elected Representatives mainly started using social media for the purpose to get official communication from the Village Panchayat apart from this they rarely use the tools for interaction with the community. Out of remaining 4 representatives, two representatives recently started using of social media for interaction with their family and have less awareness for using it different purpose, the other two representatives are less interested to be part of social media and they feel social media reduces the direct communications.
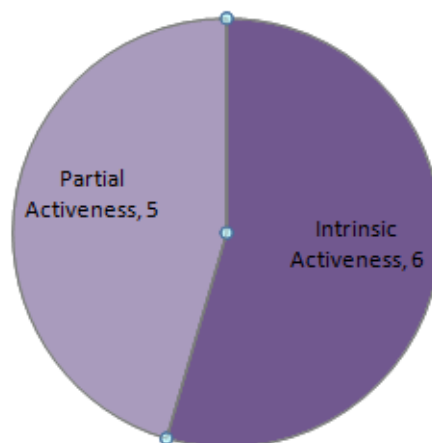
4. **Ward Groups for Communication:**

Image 4.4: Elected Representatives willingness for Social Media usage for Ward Development

i. Elected Representatives who are in their early 40s and especially as a first term representatives are highly active in utilising social media through creating Groups in Whatsapp for communicating to reach people virtually wider.

ii. The leaders have created Whatsapp Groups like Haritha Keralam (which is Kerala government programme on environment-the elected representatives seek support of the people from their ward), Youth Representative Groups (to continuously interact with the youth), Adult Development Groups, Child Development Groups (for sports, well being purpose), Resident Association Groups, Special clubs for Farmers, Alumni Association Groups (from their wards), Cultural clubs, Library Groups etc.

iii. The main reason for the elected representative to create social media groups is intrinsic notion to have more discussion on different aspects in getting more views or participation from the people.

iv. Elected Representatives who are partially active in social media are part of groups related to their wards created by citizens.

5. **Leaders to People Communication:**

i. The Elected Representatives said that they are using social media mainly for informing, educating, providing updates and notices by pushing information out to the citizens in their respective wards.

ii. The Information will be mainly the discussions happened in the Village Panchayat or discussions of any committees they represent.

iii. The leaders say they do regular post to aware citizens about how to avail the benefits of the schemes of the Government.

iv. The leaders aslo says they seek the participation of citizens in voluntary activities happening in their ward or panchayat.

6. **Response level of Citizens:**

Image 4.5 Citizens Responses through Social Media

i. As per Elected Representatives, nearly 15-20 percentage (Average 230-250) of their ward area population represent different social media groups which they are part of.

ii. Most of the participants are women (atleast 15 percentage of total women in ward) who are in kudumbasree, youngsters (25-30 percentage of total youth in ward), other people especially farmers and elders (10-15 percentage).

iii. Five elected Representatives mentioned that they get very good response from the people especially youth and women about any issue or initiative or any discussions happening in the group.

iv. Three of the Elected Representatives said that the percentage of response from the people is average as only few people participate in sharing their opinions on the platform.

v. Other 3 elected representatives said the social media groups related to their wards are completely silent and it is only for sending congratulation messages or forward messages.

vi. To motivate the citizens who are not responding, the representatives say that they regularly motivate the citizens through showing best practices of other village panchayats.

vii. The Elected Representatives involves the ASHA, Anganwadi teacher, Kudumbsree in making more women to participate in social media regarding ward development.

viii. This involves the use of social media to invite people to comment on plans or policies, or to encourage them to attend public meetings or participate in surveys or other community initiatives.

ix. Several of the respondents cited creative social media initiatives that were used to help build a sense of community, or to increase their social media presence among citizen.

7. Important Initiatives brought out by citizens and elected representatives of ward:

i. There were 5 elected representatives responded that through social media groups related to their wards brought out creative ideas and initiatives by the citizens in the constituency.

ii. The Elected Representative from Kachayani Ward has said through the discussion in social media group the ward has started a new initiative called children's nutrient exhibition Vegetable seed for better child health.

iii. One of the initiative was Fresh water Fish Farming in the lake present in the ward. Another initative in the same Kachani ward of Karakullam Village Panchayat was encouragement of Organic Vegetable farming and selling of produce in open market of Ward itself.

iii. The Youngsters of one Eanikkara ward has discussed in the social media to start waste management in the ward itself and proposed to set up Bio gas plant.

iv. One ward has initiated a Men's Self help group called Sahodriyam. This initiation mainly happened through initial discussion happened in social media group.

v. One of the Ward in Vembayam Village Panchayat has Alumni Association Group it has members settled across the world. It discusses about several welfare activities for development of their village especially school infrastructure, sports facilities for children, senior citizens caring etc.

vi. One of Representative said, culture activities will be regularly discussed on social media groups for providing platform for children to showcase their talent in the ward level.

vii. The Youth Social Media Group of one ward has initiated every year sports tournaments for the children.

viii. Recent Floods and Ockhi cyclone, the citizens became active and discussed continuously on social media groups to provide support through their ward especially clean up activity of

8. Concerns brought up on Social Media by citizens:

i. The elected representatives of wards who are actively using social media mentioned the citizens express concerns regularly for the immediate action.

ii. One Representative said that in his ward if there is any encroachment happening the citizens take photos of it and transfer to the group. To make the things transparent or take an action on it the officials are also involved in group.

iii. The People complain about the late in delivery of services especially drinking water, any beneficiary mismatch.

9. Advantage of Social Media to Elected Representatives:

i. Some Elected Representatives responded that social media has helped them in time management. They can easily communicate to an individual or group of citizens at whatever time possible.

ii. The Leaders said the planning or taking initiative is very participative now as many citizens give their prior opinion whether it is helpful for the community or not.

iii. Through social media they are able to connect or involve youngsters easily in various voluntary programmes or development activities.

iv. Some female elected representatives mentioned that social media groups has helped them in reaching out more women and helped them to integrate more women in kudumbsree network, SHGs. Apart from this they're able to discuss on plan related to women component, health and sanitation easily.

v. Some elected representatives felt happy due to social media groups the citizens especially youth are more interested towards the Village Panchayat development as there is some increase in Ward Sabha participation.

vi. But there is a different notion from other elected representatives, they say the participation level in ward sabhas is being completely falling down.

vii. Some ward representatives mentioned that the Social media has been catalyst to increase the youth clubs in the wards which created activeness among the youth.

viii. Two elected representatives mentioned that the use of social media has improved public service delivery, either by reducing the amount of in-person contact needed, or enabling the organization to respond more quickly to reported problems.

CHAPETR 5 Findings and Suggestions

Findings:

1. The Vembayam Panchayat is completely active on Facebook, as citizens and Panchayat officials regularly interact.

2. In the case of Karakulam Panchayat the Facebook Page is not regularly updated and less is known about its usage of other social media tools.

3. Both the Village Panchayats are using social media enormously for the promotion of State Government Initiatives like Haritha Keralam, Killiar Mission etc and activating women, farmers, and youth in taking part and implementation.

4. People in Vembayam Panchayat as observed in Facebook page are regular in sharing of opinion, suggestions and also pointing out irregularities.

5. The Village administration of vembayam has responded positively by setting toll free numbers or separate social media group for taking immediate actions on the required subject brought out by citizens.

6. Only 7 out of 15 Elected Representatives of Wards are actively using social media for the community engagement purpose. Interestingly these elected representatives are in their early 40s. Other Eight elected representatives feels difficult in utilising social media due to new to smart phone/technology.

7. Elected Representatives are involving ASHA workers, Kudumbsree, Anganwadi for bringing more women in social media platform.

8. Social media has helped the elected representatives in getting creative and innovative ideas from the people especially youngsters.

9. All the Elected Representatives who are having social media are focusing on children and adolescents development in their wards.

10. The Elected Representatives have made Alumni Associations and Non Resident Keralites Social Media groups which is helping them in developing schools, anganwadi and other infrastructure development of the wards.

11. Elected Represenatives strongly feel social media has helped in time management and easier platform to know about the constituency in better manner.

12. The participation of people in Ward/Gram Sabhas has not been improved among youngsters and even after elected representatives are connected with them through social media.

13. The Elected Representatives who are using social media are able to get prior opinions of the atleast (15-20%) people in Ward Development Plans. This is helping leaders to focus in Village Panchayats or committee meetings they're part of.

Suggestions:

1. As Digital Connectivity under Bharat Net has reached across Inida, The Village Panchayats in entirely Kerala and India should consider about having Social Media Networking Sites as it can be strong catalyst in building connection between people and panchayat.

2. The State Institute of Rural Development and Other Government Training agencies should have a detailed training for newly elected representatives or existing one of each and every ward about utilising of Social Media for developing of their constituencies. It should be also applicable for the Panchayat officials.

3. Village Panchayat should integrate all the Local Government Department officials into a common social media platform which can transfer information to the citizens.

4. Elected Representatives for the purpose of women and child development should focus on integrating with ASHA, Anganwadi, Self Help Groups and young women through Social Media, so more women can come forward.

5. Social Media can be helpful in developing of leadership qualities of the elected representatives especially women as it helps to understand different stakeholders through the regular discussions with the people along with officials.

6. Social Media can act as a grievance redressal or social audit platform in the Village Panchayat where citizens can freely raise about any issues or irregularities, improper implementation of schemes, wrong selection of beneficiaries, delay in the work etc. This can enable towards transparency and accountability.

7. The NGOs, Government or voluntary agencies can train the citizens especially youngsters and women of village panchayats in awaring about importance of social media, this can help them to initiate social media groups for the governance purpose.

8. Social Media can be helpful to create a databank for the Employment Status of youth in the village panchayat, this can be easier for identifying the youngsters for various skill development trainings and employment opportunities.

9. Various voluntary activities can be achieved smoother through involving youth, women, farmers, elders and other stakeholders through social media and get their opinions in implementing and sustaining initiatives.

10. Gender Neutral panchayats can be possible with the creation of youth social media groups, women groups where everyone has equal voice and express freely their opinions. This could help Village Panchayat in better nutrition, education, equal opportunity.

11. The citizens of panchayat who have been migrated to different places across country or world should be connected through Village Panchayat or Elected Representatives which can help in socio-economic development of people of the Village Panchayat through bringing innovative initiatives.

12. The Participation of People in the Gram Sabhas can be enhanced with the help of Social Media. The prior opinions can be collected from the people through social media and it could be utilised in Village Development Planning.

Conclusion:

The Two Village Panchayats and Elected Representatives who are using social media in this study have completely opened space for the participatory way of development where the initiative has created to reach the unreachable citizen and provided space for the equal opportunity. As Kerala is already known for its best in Local Governance and maximum digital literate State, the utilization of Social Media will be a game changer for the leadership enhancement of the elected representatives and stakeholders in the Village Panchayats. Though the research has been very less sample size, but the strong statements of the representatives enabled to understand that more the active of representatives in social media more the active participation of citizens in participatory development of Village Panchayats.

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Appendix: Interview with Village Panchayat President

Name of the Elected representative:

Panchayat Name:

Does the Village Panchayat is having any social media page?

I f yes, when it was initiated?

What was the main motto to be part of this creation?

Do you regularly go through the social media page?

Are the citizens especially women and youth of Village Panchayat aware about this social media?

What purpose do you use social media for connecting with the people? Ex: for awaring citizens about govt schemes, seeking cooperation from the people, motivating youth, conducting meetings, seeking feedback

Do the citizens respond to your messages back?

Which are the group of citizens actively respond?

How do you motivate the citizens who are not actively taking part?

Do anytime citizens bring any new initiatives?

How do you support it?

Do your ward members are having social media connected with their wards?

Whether ward members convey the messages of their respective wards to you?

Whether this information brought by the ward members through social media has helped in

Appendix: Interview Schedule of Ward Elected Representatives

1. Name of the Elected Representative:

2. Ward Number/ Ward Name:

3. Gender:

4. Experience as a Leader:

5. Population of your ward:

6. Are you member of which committee:

7. Do you use social media- Yes/No

    If yes what are the social media applications you use-

    a.   Facebook   b. Twitter c. Watsapp d. All of the above e. Extra Application

       If No,

     How do you communicate with your people regularly:

     What are the other methods do you follow

     Whether the active people's participation happens through that method

      Do you get suggestions/feedback/ claims regularly through this method

      How do you ensure every group of stakeholders participation

8.   Do you use the above social media applications to communicate with the people of your ward/village panchayat?
    Yes/No

9. If yes, do you discuss with the people in common group or according to the different stakeholders like women, youth, farmers?

10. Whether the initiative to talk to the people through social media has been done by Panchayat or by the people?

    Try to ask what was the reason.

11. How much percentage of people are part of this social media initiative-

    a. Women ( )   b. Youth ( )   c. Elders (   ) d. Other people

12. Does the Non Resident Keralites of your ward/panchayat are also part of this group- Yes/No

13. How do you as a leader use social media with communicating the people?

Sharing News, Employment Opportunities, about starting any new initiative, promoting new activities, collect feedback, planning for the village, cooperation, volunteering, knowledge transfer, debate

14. What is the level of response from the people to your messages?

Probe if Necessary:

If the response is good, from which category do you get Instant responses?

Whether the responses will be according to the topic?

If the response is not satisfactory, what are the reasons behind it?

Have you tried to make the things smoother for their involvement?

15. Do the people bring up any initiatives and have discussed on this matter in the social media?

16. If any Important initiative, please mention:

17. Do the people feel free in raising any concern related to the a. Delay of Work b. corruption and any other matters which troubles them?

18. What are the main issues do you remember people have brought in front of you?

19. The Ideas, Suggestions, Feedback which comes from the people- how do you document it?

20. Do the President, ASHA workers, Kudumbasree workers, and local leaders are part of this group and regularly follow the discussions happening in the group?

21. Does the discussions happened in the platform will be helpful to have better preparation in ward sabha/ village panchayat?

22. How is the participation level of people in social media in comparing to Gram Sabha?

23. Are the people satisfied with the discussions done in the social media and implementation of the discussions on the field?

24. After the initiation of discussions in Social Media whether there is a change in participation of people in Gram Sabha?

25. How did you utilize social media recently for the recent floods for mobilizing people for the contributions?

26. Do you feel social media can make a difference in reaching out people easier?