

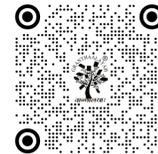
Original Article

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL WELFARE: ENHANCING SNEHITHA INITIATIVE VISIBILITY IN WAYANAD, KERALA

Dr. Jobin Joy ^{1*}, A. Ancy ²

¹ Assistant Professor, Journalism and Mass Communication, Pazhassiraja College, Pulpally, Wayanad, Kerala, India

² Sub Editor, Rashtra Deepika Ltd., Kottayam, Kerala, India



ABSTRACT

The SNEHITHA initiative, a core part of Kerala's Kudumbashree Mission, serves as a vital gender help desk for women and children facing distress. In districts like Wayanad, SNEHITHA provides a lifeline, offering everything from crisis counselling and legal aid to emergency short-stay shelters. While these services are essential for tackling domestic violence and human trafficking, their impact depends entirely on whether the community knows they exist. Our study examines how social media has changed this dynamic in Wayanad. For women in rural and semi-urban areas, digital platforms are more than just communication tools; they are breaking down long-standing social stigmas and geographical hurdles. The researchers found that social media significantly boosted SNEHITHA's visibility. More importantly, it led to higher engagement and gave more women the confidence to step forward and seek help. These findings show that digital outreach is no longer optional for gender justice. By fostering direct community participation, these tools align local welfare efforts with India's broader Vision 2047 for inclusive development. Ultimately, this research demonstrates how a smart digital strategy can turn a silent policy into a lived reality for the women who need it most.

Keywords: Social Media Awareness, SNEHITHA Initiative, Women Empowerment, Gender Help Desk, Digital Public Policy

INTRODUCTION

THE GEOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL PARADOX OF WAYANAD

Wayanad presents a unique challenge for public administration. Tucked away in the high-altitude plateaus and dense forests of Kerala's Western Ghats, the district exists in a state of structured vulnerability. On paper, Kerala is a model of social development, boasting India's highest literacy rates and most favorable sex ratio. Yet, Wayanad's reality is more complex. Its demographics comprised of indigenous Adivasis, migrant farmers, and plantation laborers—is culturally rich but difficult to serve uniformly. Geography itself often dictates access to justice. Many tribal colonies sit in such remote areas that reaching a government office requires a full day's journey and significant expense. Because of these barriers, a persistent last-mile connectivity gap remains. The SNEHITHA Gender Help Desk offers 24/7 tele-counseling, legal aid, and emergency shelter through the Kudumbashree Mission, but these services can only help those they can reach.

INFORMATION ASYMMETRY AND THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

Patriarchal norms in rural settings do more than just govern behavior; they act as a gatekeeper to the private sphere, systematically filtering out external support. We observed a clear disconnect between traditional media outreach and domestic

*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Dr. Jobin joy (jobinjoy@prc.ac.in), A. Ancy (ancy31as4@gmail.com)

Received: 12 January 2026; Accepted: 16 February 2026; Published 14 March 2026

DOI: [10.29121/ShodhVichar.v2.i1.2026.77](https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhVichar.v2.i1.2026.77)

Page Number: 42-47

Journal Title: ShodhVichar: Journal of Media and Mass Communication

Journal Abbreviation: ShodhVichar J. Media & Mass Commun.

Online ISSN: 3107-6408, Print ISSN: 3108-270X

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

reality. Because radio and print feel impersonal and 'public,' they rarely penetrate the private walls of the household. The result is a classic Information Asymmetry: the state has the tools to help, but the victims remain stranded on the other side of a communication gap. The bottleneck here isn't a lack of institutional capacity—it's that our current methods of outreach are failing to bridge the gap between the public square and the private home.

THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Kerala's hinge toward a Knowledge Economy has redefined the parameters of social welfare, placing digital infrastructure at the heart of public service delivery. This study situates itself within that transition, investigating the critical shift from traditional, analogue outreach to a 'Digital-First' dissemination strategy. To understand this evolution, the research is structured around three core investigative pillars

- 1) To quantify the efficacy of social media (WhatsApp) in increasing help-seeking behaviour among women in Wayanad.
- 2) To analyse the psychological and sociological barriers bypassed by digital communication.
- 3) To provide a scalable model for digital public policy consistent with India's Vision 2047.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand why a simple digital message can trigger a life-changing decision to seek help, we lean on three established theories. These aren't just academic labels; they explain the actual mechanics of trust and technology in Wayanad.

- 1) **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM):** The Habit Loop Fred Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) suggests that people adopt new systems based on two things: how useful they think it is (Perceived Usefulness) and how hard it is to use (Perceived Ease of Use).
 - **Ease of Use in Wayanad:** Most government apps fail because they require too much storage or technical savvy. WhatsApp is different. It's frictionless and already woven into the daily habits of women in Kerala.
 - **Usefulness in SNEHITHA:** Our focus here is moving from latent to active usefulness. It isn't enough that the help desk exists; it must be perceived as reachable with a single click.
- 2) **Social Capital Theory: Bonding vs. Bridging** Robert Putnam famously described social capital as the glue of a community. In Wayanad, this glue is everywhere.
 - **Bonding Capital:** This exists within Kudumbashree Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs). These are tight-knit, high-trust networks where women already support one another.
 - **The Digital Bridge:** We argue that social media acts as a digital bridge. When an NHG leader shares a SNEHITHA poster, she isn't just sending an image; she is lending her personal credibility to the institution. The trust the group has in her is transferred to the service she's promoting.
- 3) **Diffusion of Innovations:** The Digital Channel: Everett Rogers categorised communication as either Mass Media or Interpersonal. Historically, welfare awareness relied on Mass Media, which rarely changes deep-seated behaviors.

WhatsApp creates a hybrid: the Interpersonal Digital Channel. Because the message arrives in a group where the user knows and trusts the other members, it carries more weight. It accelerates the Adoption of a radical idea—that calling for help is not just okay, but socially acceptable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) ICT4D and the Kerala Model: From e-Governance to m-Governance

The path of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) in Kerala has reached a pivotal inflection point. We are witnessing a decisive migration from centralized, desktop-bound e-governance toward a decentralized, mobile-centric m-governance framework. As [Devika \(2016\)](#) and others have noted, ICT tools in the Kerala context are not merely transactional utilities; they are instruments that intersect with the state's unique history of social mobilization. This is most evident in the digital evolution of the Kudumbashree Mission. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategic shift to WhatsApp was far more than a logistical stopgap—it served as a definitive proof of concept for digital resilience. By embedding these tools within pre-existing feminist solidarities, the state effectively transformed the smartphone into a portable office for frontline workers [Gurumurthy and Chami \(2021\)](#). This techno-social integration allowed health and safety protocols to penetrate the last mile, succeeding in intimate spaces where traditional broadcast media often reached a dead end.

2) The Shadow Pandemic and Digital Safety Valves

The urgency of this digital shift is underscored by the Shadow Pandemic—the global surge in domestic violence documented extensively by [UN Women \(2020\)](#). When physical interventions were paralyzed by lockdown mandates, digital helplines emerged as

a critical safety valve. Research into digital health and safety—such as that by [Narasimhan \(2024\)](#)—highlights a growing preference for text-based, digital-first contact over traditional voice calls in sensitive contexts. This preference aligns with what is often discussed as the Veil of Privacy. In the high-stakes environment of a supervised home, digital messaging allows a survivor to seek help without the auditory risk of being overheard. The asynchronous nature of WhatsApp—the ability to discreetly send or delete messages—provides women with a vital strategic advantage in restrictive domestic settings. For an initiative like SNEHITHA, these digital affordances are not just features; they are essential mechanisms that lower the psychological threshold for making that first, often perilous, point of contact.

3) Theoretical Intersections: Beyond the Digital Divide

To understand the efficacy of SNEHITHA, we must look beyond the binary of internet access and adopt a more nuanced lens. We utilize Jan [van Dijk \(2020\)](#) framework of the Cumulative and Sequential Model of the Digital Divide. He argues that the barrier is rarely just hardware (Physical Access) or digital literacy (Skills Access); the most significant hurdle is often Strategic Access—the ability to use digital tools to improve one's life situation. In districts like Wayanad, a woman may possess a smartphone but still view a digital government poster with skepticism or Apprehension of Benefit. SNEHITHA addresses this gap through Multimodal Dissemination. By prioritizing audio-visual content over dense, bureaucratic text, the initiative minimizes cognitive load and strips away the formal intimidation typical of government procedures. In doing so, it successfully rebrands the state—shifting its image from a distant bureaucracy to an approachable, immediate ally.

RESEARCH STRATEGY: SINGLE GROUP PRE-TEST POST-TEST

The study utilised a Quasi-Experimental Design (O1 X O2).

- **Baseline (O1):** Ten days of call data without active digital intervention (May 13–22).
- **Intervention (X):** Five days of high-intensity digital seeding (May 23–27). The intervention included Multi-modal content: posters for visual impact and 60-second audio clips for those with visual impairments or low literacy.
- **Post-test (O2):** Ten days of call data monitoring (May 28 – June 6).

GRANULAR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical validity of this study rests on the comparative analysis of help-seeking behavior across three distinct phases: the pre-intervention baseline, the active intervention window, and the post-intervention observation period. The primary metric used is the Daily Call Volume (DCV) received by the Snehitha Gender Help Desk.

PHASE I: BASELINE OBSERVATION (O1)

During the initial ten-day observation period (May 13 – May 22, 2025), the Snehitha help desk received a total of 63 calls. The mean daily call volume stood at 6.3 calls. The data during this period was relatively stable, with minor fluctuations ranging from a low of 4 calls to a high of 9 calls. This baseline represents the organic reach of the initiative through traditional word-of-mouth and existing physical signage in the district.

PHASE II: THE INTERVENTION SURGE (X)

Between May 23 and May 27, 2025, the digital intervention was launched. This involved the systematic seeding of multi-modal content into WhatsApp clusters. Interestingly, the immediate reaction was not a massive spike but a steady stabilization. The total calls received during these five days were 32, maintaining a mean of 6.4 calls. This phase is critical as it represents the latency period—the time required for information to be downloaded, processed, and validated within the social network.

PHASE III: POST-INTERVENTION IMPACT (O2)

The most significant data shift occurred in the ten days following the intervention (May 28 – June 6, 2025). The total call volume rose to 73, with the daily mean increasing to 7.3 calls. This represents a 15.8% increase over the baseline.

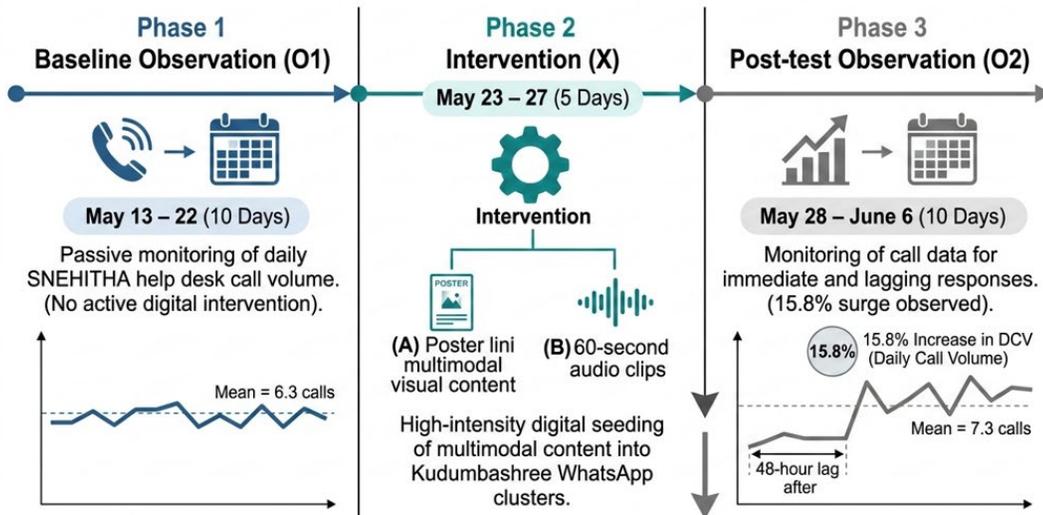
Date	Calls (Pre-Intervention)	Date	Calls (Post-Intervention)
13.05.25	9	28.05.25	6
14.05.25	4	29.05.25	11
15.05.25	8	30.05.25	8
16.05.25	7	31.05.25	6
17.05.25	7	01.06.25	7

18.05.25	8	02.06.25	6
19.05.25	5	03.06.25	8
20.05.25	4	04.06.25	5
21.05.25	6	05.06.25	9
22.05.25	5	06.06.25	7
Mean (O₁)	6.3	Mean (O₂)	7.3

Phase	Days	Total Calls	Mean Calls (μ)	Standard Deviation (σ)
Pre-Intervention	10	63	6.3	1.8
Post-Intervention	10	73	7.3	1.6

This represents a 15.8% increase. In the realm of public health and safety, a 15% increase in help-seeking behavior within a 30-day window is categorised as a high-impact intervention.

Single group pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design (O1 X O2)



THE 48-HOUR LAG PHENOMENON

A critical finding was the peak on May 29 (11 calls). Analysis shows that digital content has a maturation period. Victims do not call immediately; they save the poster or audio clip and wait for a safe window—usually 24 to 48 hours after exposure. This proves that digital content serves as a latent resource that empowers the victim to choose the timing of their escape or intervention.

THE DIGITAL WHISPER AND VIRAL SOCIAL PROOF

We conceptualise the Digital Whisper as the process where sensitive information circulates through high-trust digital clusters. Unlike an impersonal ad, a forwarded message in an NHG group acts as a Social Proof. If the group leader shares it, the recipient feels that seeking help is what women in my community do.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: DECONSTRUCTING THE DIGITAL WHISPER

The empirical data collected from the SNEHITHA help desk call logs in Wayanad reveals a profound shift in help-seeking behaviour following the digital intervention. The analysis below connects these quantitative spikes to the core theoretical pillars of this study.

QUANTITATIVE SURGE AND THE 48-HOUR CONTEMPLATION LAG

The transition from a pre-test mean of 6.3 calls to a post-test mean of 7.3 calls represents a 15.8% increase in institutional engagement. However, the most significant finding is the distribution of these calls. The data exhibited a bell-curve effect following

the intervention, peaking on May 29 with 11 calls. This delay—which we term the 48-Hour Contemplation Lag—supports the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). While the Perceived Ease of Use (WhatsApp) was immediate, the Perceived Usefulness required cognitive processing. Unlike commercial advertisements that trigger impulsive clicks, social welfare information in a sensitive context like Wayanad requires the victim to wait for a safe window. This lag proves that digital outreach creates a latent resource; women stored the information and acted only when the domestic environment allowed for a private conversation.

SOCIAL PROOF AND BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Consistent with Social Capital Theory, the findings indicate that the source of the message was as important as the content. Calls received during the post-test phase frequently originated from women who were members of the Kudumbashree Neighborhood Groups (NHGs). The intervention successfully leveraged Bonding Social Capital. When a SNEHITHA poster is shared by an NHG secretary, it bypasses the skepticism barrier often associated with government propaganda. This Social Proof validated the act of calling; victims felt that because the information came from their trusted peer circle, the service would be safe and confidential. This aligns with the Diffusion of Innovations theory, where the opinion leaders (NHG heads) accelerated the adoption of the SNEHITHA service among late adopters in remote tribal colonies.

CONCLUSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A WELFARE INFRASTRUCTURE

This study concludes that in the unique topographical and sociological context of Wayanad, social media is no longer a peripheral communication tool—it is a foundational infrastructure for social justice. The research proves that the Information Gap in rural Kerala is not a result of a lack of services, but a result of analog friction. By transitioning to a digital-first strategy, the SNEHITHA initiative effectively bypassed the geographical gatekeepers and social surveillance that often stifle help-seeking behavior. The 15.8% engagement growth demonstrates that when the Help Desk is brought into the digital private sphere, the culture of silence surrounding domestic distress begins to dissolve. Furthermore, the study confirms that multimodal content (audio + visual) is essential for inclusivity. In a region with diverse literacy levels among the tribal and plantation populations, the audio clips provided a human connection that text alone could not achieve. Ultimately, this research validates the shift toward WhatsApp Governance, where ubiquitous technology is repurposed to support the most vulnerable segments of society, ensuring that the Kerala Model of Development evolves into a Knowledge-Led Empowerment Model.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

To align with India's Vision 2047 for inclusive development, the first critical recommendation is the formal institutionalization of Digital Outreach Officers (DOO) within the Kudumbashree Mission at the district level. Modern public administration must evolve beyond the limitations of static websites and physical hoardings, which often fail to reach marginalized populations in real-time. The DOO would be responsible for curating and localizing snackable content—specifically tailored posters and audio clips—to be disseminated through existing Neighborhood Group (NHG) WhatsApp clusters. Grounded in Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory, this strategy transforms information into Interpersonal Digital Channels, ensuring that vital help-desk contact information remains active and retrievable within the community's digital memory, thereby collapsing the distance between the state's resources and the citizen's needs.

Additionally, future welfare policies must adopt Multi-modal and Vernacular-First Protocols by mandating a No-Text-Only rule for digital awareness campaigns. This policy requires that every initiative include a 60-second audio summary and a visual, icon-based poster to ensure accessibility for all literacy levels. As evidenced in the Wayanad study, audio clips are a powerful tool for inclusivity; they bypass literacy barriers and provide a veil of privacy for victims living in supervised or hostile domestic environments, as information can be consumed discreetly via earphones. By prioritizing these multimodal formats, the government can ensure that social welfare information is not just distributed, but is genuinely accessible to the elderly, the visually impaired, and those in the most remote tribal colonies.

Finally, the study suggests a strategic shift toward Bystander Activation and Data-Driven Resource Allocation to turn every smartphone user into a potential link in the social safety net. Rather than targeting victims in isolation, policy should aim to expand Bridging Social Capital by encouraging the community to act as intermediaries through Help your neighbor calls-to-action. This community-centric approach should be supported by real-time call tracking to identify Low-Reach zones where engagement is minimal. By monitoring these metrics, administrators can launch targeted Digital Blitzes within specific, under-represented Panchayats. This data-driven precision ensures that interventions are not scattered but are strategically deployed to trigger awareness in the exact locations where the culture of silence remains most prevalent.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Arora, P. (2019). *The Next Billion Users: Digital Life Beyond the West*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674238879>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (241–258). Greenwood.
- Bridges, L. E., and Bentley, C. M. (2022). The Triple Digital Divide: Assessing the Outcomes of Digital Inclusion for Women in Rural India. *Information, Communication and Society*, 25(14), 2101–2119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1933565>
- Castells, M. (2011). *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>
- Devika, J. (2023). *Kudumbashree and the Politics of Empowerment: Women's Social Mobilization in Kerala*. Oxford University Press.
- Dutton, W. H. (Ed.). (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199589074.001.0001>
- Gurumurthy, A., and Chami, N. (2021). Digitalization for Women's Rights: Resilience and Feminist Solidarity During COVID-19. *IT for Change*.
- Heeks, R. (2017). *Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D)*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315652603>
- Kudumbashree Mission. (2024). *Snehitha Gender Help Desk Annual Impact Report 2023-24*. Government of Kerala.
- Nair, P. (2022). Digital Literacy and Consciousness-Raising: A Study of Rural Women in Kerala. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 17(2), 145–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731741221094031>
- Narasimhan, S. (2024). Textual Sanctuaries: How Mobile Messaging Changed Domestic Violence Reporting in South Asia. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 28(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2023.2291034>
- O'Donnell, S., and Sweetman, C. (2018). Introduction: Gender, Development and ICTs. *Gender and Development*, 26(2), 217–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2018.1489952>
- Pandey, R., and Sharma, M. (2024). Asynchronous Empowerment: The Role of WhatsApp in Secretive Help-Seeking Among Rural Women. *Journal of Rural Sociology and Development*, 19(3), 302–325.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.
- Sreekumar, T. T. (2007). Cyber-Development in Rural Kerala: Critical Perspectives and Policy Options. *Information Technology for Development*, 13(2), 115–134. <https://doi.org/10.1002/itdj.20059>
- UN Women. (2024). *Leveraging Digital Technologies to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Global Best Practices*. United Nations.
- van Dijk, J. (2020). *The Digital Divide*. Polity Press.
- Walton, R., and DeRenzi, B. (2021). ICT4D and the Human Infrastructure: Trust and Social Capital in Digital Interventions. *Journal of Development Studies*, 57(9), 1540–1558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1897081>