

Cultural Display and Community Return: A Study of Siddi Perceptions of Social Media Representation

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Abstract:

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have become prominent domains for the circulation and consumption of cultural representations of Indigenous and tribal communities. The Siddi community, a tribal group residing primarily in parts of Karnataka, Gujarat, and Telangana, has gained increasing visibility and recognition in social media space through photographs, videos, reels, and documentaries largely produced by non-community members such as tourists, journalists, researchers, and digital content creators. While these representations often claim to promote cultural awareness and appreciation, the perspectives of the Siddi community regarding such portrayals and the benefits derived from them remain underexplored in academic research.

Drawing theoretically from Cultural Appropriation Theory and Representation Theory, this study examines how the 'Siddi culture' is displayed, framed, and circulated in digital spaces, and how community members perceive these mediated portrayals. Representation Theory is employed to analyze the construction of meaning, visibility, stereotyping, and power relations embedded in social media narratives, while Cultural Appropriation Theory is used to assess community perceptions of cultural extraction, ownership, consent, and unequal benefit arising from outsider-generated content. Adopting a qualitative and ethnographic research design, the study employs in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation across selected Siddi settlements. The research explores levels of awareness regarding social media circulation, experiences of being photographed or filmed, emotional and cultural responses to representation, and perceptions of social, symbolic, or material return. By foregrounding Siddi voices, the study seeks to understand whether social media representation functions as cultural empowerment and recognition or as a form of cultural display that yields limited reciprocity. The study contributes to media and cultural studies by advancing ethical and community-centred approaches to representing marginalized communities in contemporary digital media environments.

Keywords: Social Media, Cultural, Representation, Siddi Community.

Introduction

The Siddi community are descendants of East African peoples brought to the Indian subcontinent through centuries of maritime trade, military service, and the slave trade and occupies a distinctive position in India's social and cultural landscape. Concentrated primarily in Karnataka, Gujarat, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, the Siddis have historically negotiated a layered identity: racially marked as African in a predominantly non-African society, yet culturally and linguistically embedded within Indian regional traditions for generations. This

dual positioning has made the community a recurring subject of ethnographic curiosity, journalistic coverage, and, increasingly, digital visual culture.

In the past decade, the proliferation of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and short-video applications in particular have transformed how communities like the Siddis are seen, documented, and circulated in public discourse. Photographers, travel content creators, documentary filmmakers, and cultural tourism initiatives have increasingly turned their lens toward Siddifestivals, dance forms such as Dhamal, and everyday village life, packaging these as markers of "hidden India" or "Africa in India" for wider consumption. While such visibility can generate cultural pride, economic opportunity, and broader recognition, it simultaneously raises urgent questions about authorship, consent, and the terms on which a marginalized community's image circulates in digital space.

This paper is concerned precisely with that tension and the gap between cultural display, understood as the external, often outsider-driven act of presenting Siddi identity for online audiences, and community return, understood as the extent to which such representation is felt by Siddi individuals themselves to serve, misrepresent, or bypass their own interests and self-understanding. Existing scholarship on Siddi identity has largely focused on historical origins, kinship structures, religious syncretism, and socio-economic marginalization. Comparatively little research has examined how the community itself perceives, evaluates, and responds to its own mediatized image circulating on social platforms that are frequently controlled, curated, and monetized by actors external to the community.

This gap is significant for two reasons. First, social media has become a primary, if not the primary, site through which non-Siddi publics now encounter and form impressions of Siddi identity, arguably superseding earlier modes of representation such as print ethnography or television documentary. Second, the affordances of these platforms such as virality, algorithmic amplification, decontextualized sharing, create representational conditions markedly different from earlier media forms, conditions that may accelerate stereotyping even as they promise visibility and voice. Understanding whether and how the Siddi community perceives a "return" on this visibility—economic, cultural, political, or otherwise is therefore essential to a fuller account of contemporary minority representation in India's digital public sphere.

Social Media

The rise of social media has fundamentally reshaped how marginalized and ethnically distinct communities are seen, narrated, and consumed by wider publics. Scholars increasingly describe online ethnographic engagement with such communities as a form of "netnography," in which digital tools now carry and circulate manifold narratives of indigenous presence, giving researchers and audience access to cultural images and symbols once available only through physical fieldwork (Digital Ethnography Within Indigenous Contexts, 2024). This shift has created new pathways for communities to appear in public discourse, but it has also introduced representational dynamics that did not exist in earlier media forms.

A growing body of literature frames this tension around the concept of self-representation versus external display. Where communities are able to author their own digital presence, research on Aboriginal Facebook use in Australia found that platforms became a key self-representational tool through which users could build, display, and perform their own identity for other members of online communities (Indigenous Resistance in the Digital Age, 2022). This kind of community-authored visibility is often contrasted with "Fourth Cinema," a framework distinguishing media by a community from media merely about it, on the grounds that representation is only meaningful when the community itself is incorporated into the production process, rather than simply appearing in front of the camera (Indigenous Media, n.d.).

By contrast, when external actors — tourists, photographers, influencers, or media outlets — control the framing, outcomes are frequently described in more critical terms. Research on tribal tourism in India, drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, argues that outsider narratives tend to flatten diversity, producing a homogenized "other" in which the distinct particularities of different Adivasi communities are lost within a standardized, externally imposed image (Feminism in India, 2019). This echoes broader critiques of exoticization in visual media, where cultural practices are reduced to simplistic, stereotypical representations that romanticize or fetishize a community for outside consumption (The Exoticization Phenomenon, 2025), a dynamic traced historically from colonial-era ethnographic photography into contemporary photojournalism and social-media-driven visual tourism that often circulates without self-reflection on the power dynamics involved (Fstoppers, 2025).

At the same time, scholars caution against treating this relationship as uniformly exploitative. Quantitative work on social-media-driven tribal tourism has found that social media promotion significantly influences tourism activity, which in turn has a measurable positive effect on tribal empowerment (Atna Journal of Tourism Studies, 2025). Similarly, studies of influencer-driven ethnic content note that digital platforms can go beyond mere representation, holding potential to actively preserve and evolve traditional ways of life even as influencers craft content for global audiences (Social Media Influencers and the Ethnic World, 2024).

Comparable tensions have been documented in other minority-media contexts globally. Ethnographic work with the Guarani community found that indigenous groups actively negotiate tensions arising from social media use, balancing platform participation against the desire to preserve their ways of life and protect their environment (Smailhodzic et al., 2025). Research on India's broader tribal population has similarly observed that despite constituting a substantial share of the national population, tribal communities have remained largely outside the developmental mainstream, with northeastern tribes possessing comparatively greater digital access due to government intervention (Role of Social Media in Empowering Tribal Community, n.d.). More pointedly, first-person accounts from tribal media practitioners in India highlight the risk of collapsing distinct groups into a single narrative, noting that the term "tribal" is widely misconstrued, with dozens of distinct tribes in states like Jharkhand and West

Bengal receiving negligible individual representation in any form of media (India Development Review, 2024) precisely the kind of homogenization this study interrogates in the specific case of the Siddi community.

Siddi Tribes

The Siddis of Karnataka constitute an Afro-Indigenous ethnoreligious minority primarily inhabiting the dense forest tracts of the Western Ghats within the Uttara Kannada, Belagavi, and Dharwad districts. Tracing their lineage to Bantu-speaking populations of Southeast Africa—specifically regions encompassing contemporary Mozambique, Kenya, and Tanzania—the ancestors of the Siddis were brought to the Indian subcontinent between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries by Portuguese, Dutch, and Arab traders as enslaved laborers, sailors, and military mercenaries. A significant population escaped Portuguese subjugation in Goa, seeking refuge in the dense canopy of Karnataka's forests to establish autonomous rural settlements. Over generations, the community underwent complete linguistic and cultural assimilation while maintaining distinct physical traits. Today, the Siddis speak local dialects of Kannada and Are Marathi, and they exhibit notable religious diversity—comprising Hindu, Muslim, and Christian adherents—while maintaining shared syncretic traditions and ancestral worship practices. Their cultural heritage is characterized by expressive musical and dance forms such as *Dhamal* and *Pugdi*, which blend African polyrhythmic percussion with regional folk elements.

Despite their deep historical roots, the Siddis long endured severe socioeconomic marginalization, geographical isolation, and land insecurity, largely operating as agricultural laborers and forest gatherers. A critical shift in their institutional recognition occurred in 2003 when the Government of India officially classified the Siddis of Karnataka as a Scheduled Tribe (ST), extending affirmative action benefits, educational quotas, and targeted development scheme rights. In recent decades, state-sponsored athletic talent programs have periodically leveraged the community's physical capabilities to represent India in national track and field events. Concurrently, civic and political integration has advanced, marked by historic milestones such as the 2020 nomination of Shantaram Siddi to the Karnataka Legislative Council—the first individual of African descent appointed to an Indian state legislature. Today, the Siddi community represents a unique intersection of the African diaspora and South Asian indigenous identity, continually navigating issues of land rights, historical preservation, and contemporary political representation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in cultural representation theory, which holds that media does not simply record a culture as it is, but actively shapes how that culture comes to be understood by others. The foundational idea comes from Stuart Hall, whose theory of representation argues that meaning is not naturally attached to objects, people, or practices — it is created through images, language, and media. Hall's work explains how images, language, and discourse work together as "systems of representation," examining how photography has helped construct national identity, how other cultures have been displayed in museums, and how the racialized

"Other" gets built through popular media and film. Applied simply to this paper's context, this means that when a Siddi festival is filmed for social media, the resulting video does not just capture what happened, it builds a specific, chosen version of "who the Siddi community is" for the people watching it online.

A second part of Hall's theory, known as encoding/decoding, is also useful here. It holds that whoever creates a piece of media builds an intended meaning into it, but the audience does not have to accept that meaning — different viewers can read, or "decode," the same content in different ways. This is central to the present study because outside content creators may intend their videos or photos to be respectful or celebratory, but Siddi viewers themselves may decode that same content very differently — as flattering exposure, or as a continuation of exoticizing, extractive display.

This study also draws on the wider idea of "othering" from cultural studies, where a culture is framed as exotic, mysterious, or fundamentally different, mainly for the benefit of an outside audience. This idea underpins the paper's concept of cultural display — the pattern in which tourists, photographers, and influencers present Siddi life as "hidden India" content, often stripped of the historical context of slavery, migration, and marginalization that actually shaped the community's identity.

Review of Literature:

1. ***NidhiDinker and NehaMalviya (2024) evaluated the impact of, "Modernization of Bhil Tribe after access to Social Media: A Sociological Analysis (with reference to Sehore district to Madhya Pradesh)"***. This sociological analysis looks at the significant impact social media has had on the modernization of the Indian indigenous Bhil tribe. A complex web of cultural, social, and economic changes is taking place as this historically marginalized group gains access to social media platforms. The research uses a multifaceted methodology to look into the ways that social media influences change in the Bhil community. The study explores the mechanisms of social media-enabled cultural exchange and social connectivity, illuminating how these platforms allow the Bhil tribe to interact with the outside world while also protecting and promoting their distinct cultural legacy. The findings of the study suggested that the social media presence of the Bhil tribe in Madhya Pradesh's Sehore area has sparked a complex change that calls for a sociological examination. With their access to social media platforms, the Bhil community which has historically been marginalized has seen notable changes in social dynamics, cultural traditions, economic prospects, and political engagement. First of all, social media has made it easier for the Bhil tribe to receive information and awareness, giving them a better understanding of their rights, privileges, and opportunities for social advancement. Second, social media has given the Bhil community a platform for cultural revival and preservation. Members of the tribe can exchange tales, customs, and rituals via internet forums, groups, and websites, which promotes a feeling of pride in their cultural history and a sense of belonging. Social internet has also made it possible to record and promote Bhil music, art, and handicraft, which has helped tribal artisans get notoriety and create job prospects. Social media

has also helped the Bhil community become more economically empowered by introducing them to markets, customers, and business prospects. Bhil craftsmen can increase their economic independence and security by showcasing and selling their products to a larger audience through platforms like FacebookMarketplace and Instagram shops.

2. **ChaitaliDatta, Nirupama Prakash &Debol Kumar Singharoy (2023) conducted a study to “Analyse the Influence of Social Media on the Young Generation of Rabha Tribe of West Bengal”.** The primary focus of this study was to understand the current trends of changes over years among indigenous matrilineal forest Rabhas of West Bengal, India. The unique feature of indigenous Rabha Community is relatively different in regard to other tribal communities of West Bengal. The Rabha Community is characterised by two ecological groups (social systems and rural revenue village) with different co-existence. The researcher gathered data from primary as well as secondary sources. Qualitative Methods such as Interview and Observation was adopted by the researchers. The results of the study showed that the Rabha Community is actively experiencing a changing situation of progress, development and modernity. The studies also showed that the researcher has adopted significant changes in the exposure to the outside world beyond their community and villages. The literacy and higher educational attainments have diversified economic activities, traditional cultural pattern, traditional political institution; and also emergence of a subtle differentiation in family status in society.

3. **Alnaghaimshi and Erick Pearson (2023) conducted a study to “Analyse the Empowering Arab Tribal Culture in the Twenty-First Century: Social Media Use in the Gulf States”.** This study presents a comprehensive research that utilises inductive thematic analysis of 107 Twitter and Instagram accounts with open access of the Tribal Communities in the Gulf States. The focus of this study looked into the utility purposes and facilitating tribal power and cohesion. Of the Indigenous people residing in the Gulf State. The findings of the study indicated that the Tribal Communities of the Gulf Region have adopted social media to facilitate the maintenance of the cohesiveness and the prestige of tribal communities in the age of remarkable urbanisation and social change. The results also indicated that the new platforms have been adopted by conventional tribal groups to achieve long standing tribal goals and objectives of cohesion, unity and mutual support at the tribal – levels.

4. **Nikhil Kumar Singhmar (2023) conducted a study to analyse how “Social Media Platforms facilitate Tribal Peoples to Disperse their Indigenous Knowledge System to the World”.** This paper focuses on the epistemological understanding of tribalism, reiterating their ontological reality through rapid technological advancements of social media. The researchers broadly employ qualitative methods, that is inclusive of analysing social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The analysis focused on various public accounts on social media such as the ‘tweets by the Ministry of tribal affairs, Facebook posts and various tribal groups’ accounts that post and comment about tribal culture and their indigenous knowledge system’. The Key findings of the study suggested that social media aids tribal

communities to build awareness about their rights, perseverance of cultural identity, and engage in advocacy. The results also suggested that social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp aids tribal members to share cultural practices, languages, and traditions, which facilitates in counteracting the loss of cultural identity caused by globalization. Additionally, these platforms empower tribes to raise concerns on issues such as land displacement and access to basic infrastructure, highlighting these concerns to broader audiences. The study also discusses digital literacy among younger generations, who actively use social media platforms to connect with their heritage and champion for advancements in health, education, and infrastructure within their communities. This digital engagement promotes self-awareness as well as enables tribal communities to asserts their identity in a rapidly modernizing world. Finally the study underscores how social media contributes to economic empowerment by enabling tribal artisans to sell their crafts online, thus promoting sustainable income opportunities. However, challenges such as the digital divide and limited infrastructure in remote areas remain significant barriers to full participation in the digital sphere.

5. ***Kaushik Chattopadhyaya and Seemita Mohanty (2018) conducted a study to evaluate the “Digital Literacy, Media Consumption and Cultural Exclusion - A Study on the Lodha Tribal Community of India”*** In the current unpredictable global landscape, it is evident that our everyday lives are significantly influenced by digital literacy and the consumption of new media. At the same time, while certain social groups thrive in a dynamic and technologically advanced media landscape, others continue to embrace a media existence that aligns with and reinforces conventional and predictable norms. The reasons for this preference for a traditional media existence could be numerous: limited access to a digitized world, a lack of concern and indifference towards technologically advanced media, or a disinterest in leaving a familiar and comfortable media environment. It is commonly noted that when communities and societies undergo transformations due to technological advancements, the youth emerge as both the main creators and the primary users. In the contemporary landscape of immediate connectivity, regardless of how isolated a community may appear on a country's map, the youth invariably discover avenues to 'connect' with the broader world or tap into the diverse entertainment options that modern media presents. This study primarily aimed to explore the potential interrelationship between the existence of new media and cultural exclusion among the youth of the Lodha community. A qualitative approach to the study was employed, utilising face-to-face interviews, group discussions, and observational methods. A total of forty-four youths, aged between 16 and 35, were interviewed, comprising 32 males and 12 females, all of whom had access to phones and television. The findings indicated that tribal youths are capable of effectively and frequently utilising new media devices, even in the absence of formal school education. Among the 44 participants surveyed, 28 reported having internet access on their mobile devices. There is an increasing interest in the utilisation of smartphones. It appears that the predominant users of smartphones are men. The girls possessed feature phones.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by an overarching primary objective supported by four specific secondary objectives:

Primary Objective:

To critically analyze how members of the Siddi community perceive, evaluate, and navigate their cultural representation on digital social media platforms, and to assess the resulting socio-economic and cultural impacts on the community.

Sub-Objectives

1. To Assess Siddi Community Perceptions of Social Media Representation
2. To Evaluate the Accuracy and Authenticity of Digital Portrayals
3. To Analyze "Community Return" and Material/Social Dividends

Methodology

Primary data for the study was collected directly from the field through a dual approach involving a structured survey and key informant interviews. The researcher designed and developed a bilingual questionnaire comprising 15 questions in both English and Kannada to address the cultural, socio-economic, and media navigation perspectives of the Siddi community across different age groups and digital literacy levels. To complement the survey responses, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with social activists actively working with the community, gathering qualitative insights into ground realities, advocacy efforts, and the broader socio-political implications of digital visibility.

Secondary data was gathered to establish a theoretical framework and provide historical context for the empirical field findings. The researcher systematically reviewed scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles in media studies, communication theories, and South Asian subaltern literature, alongside academic books and monographs focusing on representation theory and cultural appropriation.

Data Analysis

Table 01: social media platform do you use or view most frequently to access content related to the Siddi community

Which social media platform do you use or view most frequently to access content related to the Siddi community?

ಸಿದ್ದಿ ಸಮುದಾಯಕ್ಕೆ ಸಂಬಂಧಿಸಿದ ವಿಷಯಗಳನ್ನು (content) ವೀಕ್ಷಿಸಲು ನೀವು ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಯಾವ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣವನ್ನು (Social Media) ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಬಳಸುತ್ತೀರಿ?

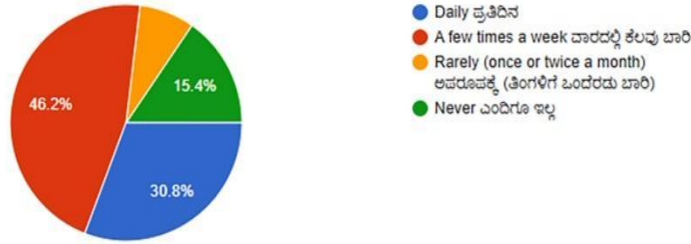


From the gathered data, nearly 46.2% of respondents use YouTube frequently to access content related to the community. Whereas 15.4% of the respondents use other social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook respectively. 7.7% of the respondents use local social media platforms such as Moj App etc. 15.4% of the respondents do not use social media.

Table 02: frequency of viewing posts, videos, or reels featuring Siddi culture, dance, or daily life on social media

How often do you see posts, videos, or reels featuring Siddi culture, dance, or daily life on social media?

ಸಿದ್ದಿ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿ, ನೃತ್ಯ ಅಥವಾ ದೈನಂದಿನ ಜೀವನದ ಕುರಿತಾದ ವಿಡಿಯೋಗಳು/ಪೋಸ್ಟ್‌ಗಳನ್ನು ನೀವು ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಎಷ್ಟು ಬಾರಿ ನೋಡುತ್ತೀರಿ?

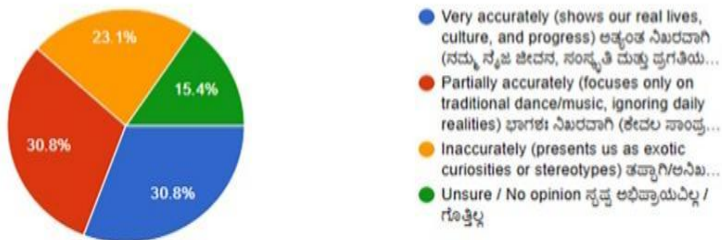


According to the respondents nearly 46.2% of the respondents view posts/videos/ reels related to the Siddi Community few times a week while 30.8% of the respondents are exposed to Siddi Community related content everyday and 7.7% of the respondents rarely view content related to the community. 15.4% of the respondents have never viewed content on social media.

Table 03: accuracy of the overall portrayal social media platforms identity and daily life of the Siddi community

In your opinion, how accurately do social media platforms portray the overall identity and daily life of the Siddi community?

ನಿಮ್ಮ ಪ್ರಕಾರ, ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳು ಸಿದ್ದಿ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ನೈಜ ಗುರುತು ಮತ್ತು ದೈನಂದಿನ ಜೀವನವನ್ನು ಎಷ್ಟು ನಿಖರವಾಗಿ ಬಿಂಬಿಸುತ್ತಿವೆ?



Nearly 30.8% of the respondents stated that the overall portrayal on social media is accurate while 30.8% of the respondents stated that overall portrayal on social media is partially accurate. 23.1% of the respondents stated that the overall portrayal on social media is inaccurate. 15.4% of the respondents are unsure of the overall portrayal on social media.

Table 04: Primary focus of External Content Creators

When external content creators (e.g., travel vloggers, YouTubers) make videos about the Siddi community, what is their primary focus?

ಹೊರಗಿನ ವೀಡಿಯೋ ನಿರ್ಮಾಪಕರು (ಉದಾಹರಣೆಗೆ: ಟ್ರಾವೆಲ್ ವ್ಲಾಗರ್‌ಗಳು, ಯೂಟ್ಯೂಬರ್‌ಗಳು) ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ವೀಡಿಯೋ ಮಾಡುವಾಗ ಅವರ ಮುಖ್ಯ ಗಮನ ಯಾವುದರ ಮೇಲಿರುತ್ತದೆ?



61.5% of respondents stated that the External Content Creators focus primarily on their traditions and Culture (Dhamal, Attire etc.) 23.1% of the respondents stated that the primary focus of the external content creators focus on the physical appearance of the Siddi Community and nearly 15.4% of the respondents stated that the emphasis was given to lifestyle challenges, socio-economic problems of the Siddi Community. **Table 05: Siddi Community perspective about their representation on social media by Non-Siddi Content Creators**

How do you feel when you watch videos made about your community by non-Siddi creators?

ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಮುದಾಯದವರಲ್ಲದವರು (ಹೊರಗಿನವರು) ನಿಮ್ಮ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಮಾಡಿದ ವೀಡಿಯೋಗಳನ್ನು ನೋಡಿದಾಗ ನಿಮಗೆ ಏನನಿಸುತ್ತದೆ?



While a large percentage of respondents, 61.5% are happy with the representation of the Siddi Community as it leads to recognition, 15.4% of respondents feel left out of the narrative and 15.4% of the respondents feel uncomfortable to be used as content and used as entertainment or stereotypes.

Table 06: Respondents being filmed by content creators

Have you or members of your family ever been filmed by visiting vloggers, journalists, or tourists for social media?

ನಿಮ್ಮನ್ನು ಅಥವಾ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಕುಟುಂಬದ ಸದಸ್ಯರನ್ನು ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಎಂದಾದರೂ ಹೊರಗಿನ ವ್ಲಾಗರ್‌ಗಳು, ಪತ್ರಿಕಾರ್ಥಿಗಳು, ಪ್ರವಾಸಿಗರು ವೀಡಿಯೋ ಮಾಡಿದ್ದಾರೆಯೇ?



Nearly 53.8% of the respondents have been or have their family members been filmed by content creators for content. 30.8% of the respondents have not been filmed and 7.7% of the respondents have been filmed in a staged / scripted set-up. The rest have been filmed without their permission.

Table 07: Primary Creators of Content related to the Siddi Community

Who do you think should primarily create and post digital content about Siddi culture?

ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಯ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಯಾರು ವೀಡಿಯೋಗಳನ್ನು/ ಮಾಹಿತಿಯನ್ನು ಹಂಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ನೀವು ಭಾವಿಸುತ್ತೀರಿ?



According to 46.2% of the respondents suggest that the youth of the Siddi Community should be the primary creators content related to Siddi Community. 23.1% of the respondents suggested that content should be created by professionals while 23.1% of the respondents suggested a collaborative initiative between Non-Siddi and Siddi Community. 7.7% of the respondents suggested that the Government should be responsible for the representation of Siddi Community on any media platform.

Table 08: Impact of Social Media Visibility

Do you feel that the high visibility of Siddi culture on social media brings tangible benefits back to your community?

ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಗೆ ಸಿಗುತ್ತಿರುವ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಪ್ರಚಾರದಿಂದ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಸಮುದಾಯಕ್ಕೆ ನಿಜವಾದ ಲಾಭಗಳು ಸಿಗುತ್ತಿವೆಯೇ?



38.5% stated that they receive minimal benefits and the external creators gain all the benefits 30.8% of the respondents state that although they do not directly receive monetary benefits, through the content creators' social media representation aids in creating awareness and recognition of the community. 23.1% of the respondents stated that social media aids in social respect and heritage recognition. 7.7% of the respondents stated that social media on a whole does more harm.

Table 09: Distribution of the financially earnings

When videos about the Siddi community generate financial earnings (ad revenue/sponsorships), how are these returns typically distributed?

ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ವೀಡಿಯೋಗಳಿಂದ ಬರುವ ಹಣಕಾಸಿನ ಆದಾಯ (Ad Revenue/Sponsorships) ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಯಾರಿಗೆ ತಲುಪುತ್ತದೆ?



According to the data collected, 61.5% of the respondents stated that all the financial earnings almost entirely stay with the external content creator. 15.4% of the respondents stated that they do not know about the monetization of social media. 15.4% of the respondents stated that a fair share of the amount can be distributed to the local performers.

Table 10: Visibility affect on the younger generation's connection to traditional Siddi art forms

How has social media visibility affected the younger generation's connection to traditional Siddi art forms (like Dhama)?

ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳ ಪ್ರಭಾವದಿಂದಾಗಿ ಯುವ ಪೀಳಿಗೆಗೆ ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಾಂಪ್ರದಾಯಿಕ ಕಲೆಗಳ (ಉದಾ: ಧಮಾಲ್) ಮೇಲಿರುವ ಬದ್ಧತೆ ಹೇಗಿದೆ?



Nearly 69.2% of the respondents encouraged the youth to preserve and take pride in performing traditional art. 23.1% of the respondents encouraged the youth to start their own social media channel to narrate their own stories. 7.7% of the respondents stated that they feel social media has turned their traditional practices commercial.

Table 11: Biggest challenge your community faces regarding social media representation today

What is the biggest challenge your community faces regarding social media representation today?

ಇಂದು ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳ ಪ್ರಾತಿನಿಧ್ಯಕ್ಕೆ ಸಂಬಂಧಿಸಿದಂತೆ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಸಮುದಾಯ ಎದುರಿಸುತ್ತಿರುವ ಅತಿ ದೊಡ್ಡ ಸವಾಲು ಯಾವುದು?



According to 69.2% of the respondents the lack of digital literacy is one of the biggest challenges faced by the Community. 15.4% of the respondents stated that misrepresentation and stereotyping of the Community is the drawback the community faces. 7.7% of the respondents stated that the biggest challenge they face is the misrepresentation on social media.

Table 12: Most important to ensure that social media representation truly serves the Siddi community

In your view, what step is most important to ensure that social media representation truly serves the Siddi community?

ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜಾಲತಾಣಗಳ ಪ್ರಾತಿನಿಧ್ಯವು ಸಿದ್ಧಿ ಸಮುದಾಯಕ್ಕೆ ನಿಜವಾಗಿಯೂ ಉಪಯುಕ್ತವಾಗಲು ನಿಮ್ಮ ಪ್ರಕಾರ ಯಾವ ಹಂತವು ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಪ್ರಮುಖವಾಗಿದೆ?



53.8% of the respondents stated that training the youth on media and digital literacy can ensure social media representation that serves the siddi community. 30.8% of the respondents stated that videos that promote the tribal community can aid the community. The rest suggested strict implementation of rules and guidelines to follow ethical representation of the community.

Interview Analysis

A central finding from the volunteer interviews is that the Siddi community prioritizes social acceptance and cultural inclusion over direct monetary return from digital content. In contemporary digital creator economies, media production is overwhelmingly evaluated through financial capital such as ad revenue, sponsorship models, and content monetization. However, for a historically marginalized group like the Siddis, the true return on digital participation lies in the accumulation of **symbolic capital**. The community's willingness to engage with social media, despite receiving no direct financial compensation underscores a structural reality: for marginalized Afro-Indigenous communities, overcoming social isolation and racial prejudice is perceived as a far more urgent necessity than short-term economic gain.

The preference for an environment that "accepts them" illustrates how social media representation functions as an informal shield against historical alienation. Historically, the Siddis of Karnataka have faced severe racial exoticization, social distance, and systemic invisibility within mainstream Indian society. By disseminating images, videos, and performance practices through digital platforms, social media creates a decentralized space that bypasses traditional media gatekeepers. The interviewees' observations suggest that increased public recognition fosters a safer, more empathetic civic atmosphere. As local and regional audiences become familiar with Siddi life, the "otherness" associated with the community begins to dissolve, cultivating regional acceptance and lowering social barriers in everyday interactions.

While social media visibility offers real social benefits, the interviews also reveal an underlying power imbalance within the political economy of digital representation. External actors, such as content creators, digital influencers, journalists, and researchers frequently extract value from Siddi cultural displays, accumulating views, followers, ad revenue, and academic prestige. Conversely, the Siddi subjects remain uncompensated, exposing a dynamic of **asymmetric cultural exchange**. Nevertheless, the community displays strategic agency: they choose to tolerate or participate in this digital extraction because the non-monetary return, societal acceptance, reduced prejudice, and cultural validation that holds profound existential value for their lived experiences.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex relationship between the Siddi community and their growing visibility on digital social media platforms. Through a combination of primary survey data, interviews with social activists, and secondary academic literature, the research reveals that while social media offers valuable opportunities for cultural preservation, economic return, and self-expression, it also exposes the community to risks of exoticization and visual

exploitation by external content creators. The findings show a clear need to bridge the gap between cultural display and genuine community return, ensuring that digital representation translates into social respect, economic fairness, and narrative control for the Siddi people. Ultimately, supporting local youth and creators in telling their own stories is essential to transforming digital visibility into a tool for long-term community empowerment and stewardship.

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