



## WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

### Communities, Digitalisation and its Challenges: Perspectives from South Asian countries

**Organizer:** Pratisha BORBORAH, Jyoti DAS

**E-Mail Address:** [pratisha.borborah@cottonuniversity.ac.in](mailto:pratisha.borborah@cottonuniversity.ac.in)

**Abstract:** Fast growing internet speed and advanced digitalization has changed the way people connect, creating new forms of social groups and communities in new-age digital media led world of virtual existence. From interaction with friends and families to sharing photos, memes and reels, individuals participate in community building and community relations through online mode. Digitalisation has entered every sphere of our everyday life bringing a new form of online culture where messages, gifts, money etc can be sent virtually through digital applications. While study of concepts such as groups and communities have been a significant part of both anthropology and sociology, these emerging online groups with shared and conflicting interests need to be analyzed from multiple perspectives in contemporary period. Thus, media is a part of our everyday culture and hence need to be investigated using new methodological tools and theories. Nevertheless, in a South-Asian country like India where advancement of digitalization is creating further binaries and hierarchies in an already stratified society, it becomes important to analyze the scope as well as limitations of community building in the backdrop of changing online culture.

In this context, the workshop will address pertinent issues related to human-computer interaction in South Asian countries where scholars will deliberate on larger questions like: (a) How do online communities participate in formation of micro-level family groups to macro-level nation building processes? (b) How do individuals perceive trust and solidarity in online communities? (c) What kind of anthropological and sociological methodologies can be used to study these new forms of community building in today's digital age? (d) How has the development of visual narratives accelerated the growth of social networks built through online communities?

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 2**

*Ali Reza Hussaini: Tweets for Islamic Emirates*

*Dev Krishnan Anil: Social Solidarity and Civic Engagement through Social Media: A Study of Kudumbashree Community WhatsApp Groups in Kerala, India*

## SESSION PAPERS

### **Tweets for Islamic Emirates**

*Ali Reza Hussaini*

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the Taliban's strategic use of X (formerly Twitter) during the critical period of 2021, emphasizing their communication tactics amidst Afghanistan's conflict dynamics. Focusing on the #Get\_out\_of\_Afghanistan campaign, the study scrutinizes over 10,000 tweets and 50 key Taliban accounts using digital ethnography, social network analysis, and big data analytics. The digital ethnography entailed three months of observation, while data analysis employed preprocessing, frequent word analysis, and topic modeling. Social network analysis targets whole-network and sub-network structures. The findings underscore the importance of digital strategies in contemporary ideological conflicts.

### **Social Solidarity and Civic Engagement through Social Media: A Study of Kudumbashree Community WhatsApp Groups in Kerala, India**

*Dev Krishnan Anil*

The Indian state of Kerala has had far-reaching democratic reforms through its people's plan campaign from the 1990s. The democratic decentralisation carried out in the state aimed to further democratic engagement, participatory planning and budgeting at the local level while allowing for compromises and negotiations that would bridge the gap between different sections of society and create a synergy between the State and society. This paper is based on a qualitative study conducted in six villages of Kerala as part of a PhD research project that aims to understand the role of Kudumbashree, a network of self-help groups of women, in redefining the relationship between the State and citizens at the local level through grassroots mobilisation and civil society engagement. This paper explores how this engagement is enabled through the novel use of social media applications like WhatsApp to create virtual spaces of dialogue and participation. The study showed that such online groups act as virtual village assemblies where members make elected representatives and bureaucrats accountable. The study also revealed that social media groups are used by Kudumbashree and its members in providing voluntary service to the local communities on behalf of the State, from palliative care to community kitchens, thereby developing new forms of care and kinship based on cooperation and solidarity. This paper uses Peter Evans' concept of synergy to understand how grassroots networks like Kudumbashree can foster cooperation and solidarity within communities, while collectively working for mutually beneficial objectives. By particularly looking at how Kudumbashree members use WhatsApp for information dissemination, activity organising and bureaucratic transparency, this paper argues that online communities have the potential to foster social solidarity and civic engagement if they are made part of institutional frameworks.

Keywords: Kudumbashree, Community Whatsapp Groups, Social Solidarity, Civil Engagement, Synergy