Radio & Digital Rights

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Digital connectivity has zoomed across the country, making it one of the most significant developments in post-liberalisation India. With an ever increasing digital space and the services it offers, India has witnessed an influx of internet users in the past decade. More than 50% households now have internet access. According to IDC, global investment in digital transformation will grow at a compound annual rate of 17%, reaching a whopping $2.3 trillion by 2023.

From making payments to buying clothes, one can avail almost any kind of services online. With this growing importance of the digital space, it is essential that all internet users- be it citizens or private and public entities- should learn how to navigate this evolving space responsibly. A citizen centric approach to policy-making and navigation with respect to the internet world is increasingly being given more importance. When the user is kept at the centre, their rights automatically gain significance and warrant adequate protection.

In this respect, CSOs, organizations and governments across the world are trying to spread awareness on the importance of rights in the digital space. Awareness programmes in India help in providing correct information on public services, furthering the goal of improving quality of life. Community Radio is one audio medium that continues to be widely used to disseminate information to the masses. With its direct and long-term connect, a community radio understands the issues and needs of its respective communities very well. The communities also trust and rely on the community radio as it is being run by people from the community itself.

Leveraging the power and reach of community radio, SMART, supported by The German Embassy, partnered with 10 CSO-led community radios across the country to spread awareness on digital rights of the internet users. Through 16 radio programmes and various community outreach activities, the audience was made aware of the existence of human rights online. These radio programmes were written in a storytelling format where each episode introduced characters facing certain issues in the digital space. Through these stories, listeners were introduced to the reality of exercising one's rights in the digital space, just as they can in the real world.

Radio programming, with its flexibility of format, is highly interactive and conveys information in diverse ways and languages to its listeners. This not only helps in reaching out to diverse communities but also helps in making them understand complex themes and topics such as digital rights. A community radio largely picks up experiences of its community members and weaves narratives around social issues, to increase the relativity factor.

Along with radio programming, community radios work closely with the community by conducting engagement activities on ground. When a group of people sits in an enclosed space and listens to an entire radio program, the interactions that follow post this activity not only help the community understand and imbibe information effectively but also help the community radio understand different aspects of the issue or theme in question. Through direct interaction and exchange of experiences, community radio has helped the community in highlighting not only the importance of rights online but also the responsibility an internet user has towards its fellow users.

Sharing individual stories of fraud, unwarranted surveillance and infringement of right to privacy and speech, on radio help in de-stigmatizing the fears of using the internet and help

the audience in taking the right steps to ensure their safety online. Connecting roles and responsibilities to rights, through these stories, is how the community radio has been able to spread awareness on human rights online.