

# PURPOSE OF ENGAGING TAMIL LANGUAGE IN CYBERSPACE CONVERSATION: A STUDY AMONG STUDENTS OF PERIYAR UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** *Cyberspace and social media cannot be separated easily primarily due to the fact that there are a lot of aspects and phenomena that are common to both the domains. Social media happens to be the advanced form of internet or Web 1.0 whereas cyber space is a more internal and important aspect of internet in itself. Despite various aspects and areas of research in Internet and cyberspace which were done over a large period of time, the aspect of cyberspace engagement has been done sparingly and not as much as other areas and aspects. Conversationality is something that is core to both social media as well as cyber space. There are various aspects that are often spoken but there is hardly any study that speaks on the purpose of engaging in cyberspace conversation especially in a vernacular language. In spite of various areas that were concentrated by researchers across the globe, there are hardly any studies made or done by them with regards to engagement of students in cyberspace especially in a language like Tamil. This research study looks into finding out the purpose of engaging in Tamil language in cyberspace among the students of Periyar University, Salem by employing quantitative research approaches in the form of questionnaire to elicit responses and reaching the objective of the study undertaken.*

**Key Words:** *Cyberspace, Conversation, Tamil language, Purpose, Students,*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

### 1.1 India and the cyber world:

India has about 230 million active internet users, which is world's third largest internet user base with the increased user percentage of 37.4 in 2013. More than 75% of internet users in India are in the age group 18-35 years. The most important reason for this growth is that internet is a cheap, fast means of international communication of text, sound or image. In other words, an information resource without political or content boundaries; limited only by the extent to which the information providers are willing to disclose their materials and the fruits of their own writing and research. As more and more people gain access to the Internet and with the advance of computer technology, a great variety of tools are available for people to interact with others on the Internet and there have been some research studies on computer mediated communication and different social networking sites.

A key feature of the internet is its highly interactive nature. The ease with which users of the internet can access information and communicate with each other has engendered in its users a false sense of freedom in their communications. Accessibility is another feature of the internet, which distinguishes it from traditional print or broadcast media. The relatively low cost of connecting to the internet and even of establishing one's own website means that the opportunity for defamation has increased exponentially. Now, on the internet everyone can be a publisher and can be sued as a publisher. Another key feature of the internet is that users do not have to reveal their true identity in order to send e-mail or post messages on bulletin boards (Abraham, A et al., 2012).

### 1.2 Students and Social network:

Social network sites require university students to handle cognitive and social processes such as identity formation, critical literacy and information dissemination. The conversational tone of social network sites contributes to its popularity as knowledge is effectively shared through a process of discussing, storytelling and collaborative editing contributes to their popularity among university students. University students employ social network sites to support their existing relationships. Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow users to construct a public or private profile within a system, a list of users' friends and a view of their list of connections and those made by others within that system.

### 1.3 Students' usage of language in cyber conversation:

Communication may refer to an act or a process that not only involves common experience but also mutual influence. Martin and Nakayama (2010) defined communication as “a symbolic process whereby meaning is shared and negotiated”. In other words, communication occurs whenever someone attributes meaning to another's words or actions. This is to say that communication is a two-way process involving a sender and a receiver and in which case, the symbols we send only make meaning because the other person shares our symbolic system. As a process, it involves a channel through which messages are transmitted in such a way that the people communicating can be thought as sending and receiving messages.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

### 2.1 Cyberworld Communication:

Facebook, enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate friends who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles. Facebook members can also join virtual groups based on common interests, see what classes they have in common, and learn each others' hobbies, interests, musical tastes, and romantic relationship status through the profiles (Ellison *et al.*, 2007).

### 2.2 Social media in higher education:

Aghaee, N. (2010) surveyed more than 1,000 college students in the US. They found that 64% of students use social media to 'connect with classmates' to study or work on class assignments at least several times per month. Most social media promote interaction among people, which is often argued as having positive impacts on learning outcomes in higher education settings, measured as perceived learning, grades and quality assessment of assignments (Hiltz *et al.*, 2000). This could enable new forms of collaboration and knowledge sharing for learners. However, the use of social media in higher education has been quite limited (Margaryan *et al.*, 2011).

### 2.3 Students usage of internet in vernacular (local) languages:

One of the most dramatic examples was a study done between 1948 and 1954 in fourteen schools in Iloilo Province in the Philippines. The researchers found that the kids who began in their own vernacular, when they switched to the second language, very rapidly caught up with the kids who started in English, and even surpassed them. The kids who started in the vernacular were outperforming in English the kids who started in English, in subjects ranging from reading to social studies, and even arithmetic. This was a massive study done over a fairly long period of time (Rickford, J. R. 2005).

## 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To explore the purpose of engaging Tamil language in cyberspace conversation on social media among the students of Periyar University.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

270 samples were set as a target with semi-structured questionnaire distributed among the students of Periyar University, Salem to find out the purpose of engaging Tamil language in cyberspace conversation on social media among the students.

## V. ANALYSIS

Table 5.1 Usage and adoption of cyberspace conversation on social media.

USAGE & ADOPTION			
Years	Percentage (%)	Time	Percentage (%)
1-3years	35.6	Less than 1 hour	25.6
3-5years	41.5	1-2 hours	30.0
5-7years	17.4	2-3 hours	28.5
7-10years	4.4	3-4 hours	11.1
More than 10 years	1.1	Above 4 hours	4.8

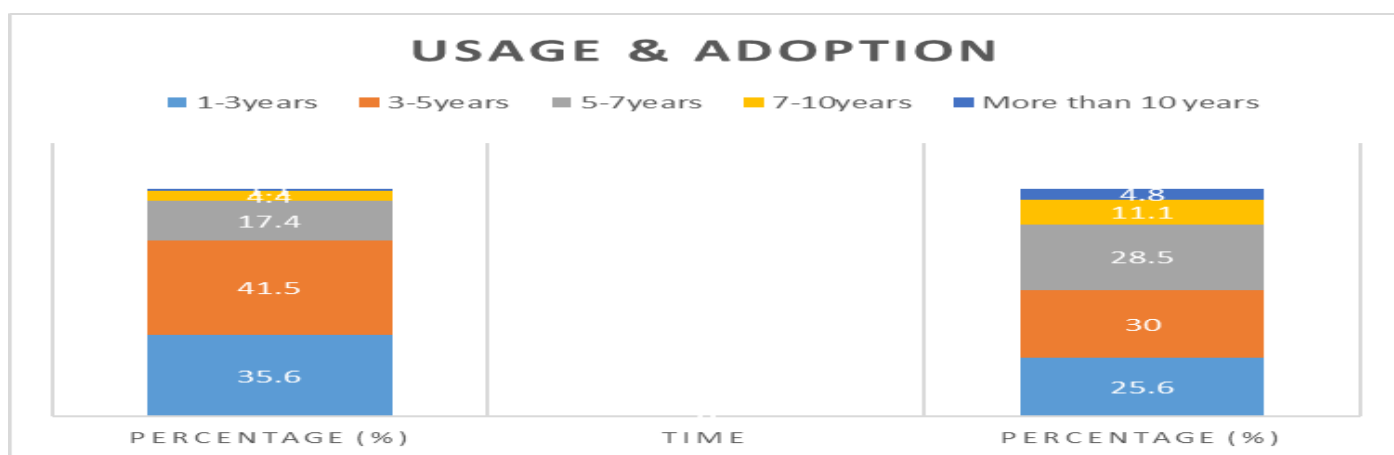


Figure 5.1

Table 5.1 and figure 5.1 helps us to infer that 41.5% of the respondents use social media from 3-4 years, 35.6% of the respondents use social media from 1-3 years, 17.4% of the respondents use social media from 5-7 years, 4.4% of the respondents use social media from 7-10 years and only 1.1% of the respondents use social media from more than 10 years. 30% of the respondents spend time in social media for 1-2 hours, 28.5% of the respondents spend time in social media for 2-3 hours and 25.6% of the respondents spend time in social media for less than one hour, 11.1% of the respondents spend time in social media for 3-4 hours and 4.8% of the respondents spend time on social media above four hours.

Table 5.2. Types of online media which students make use of in cyberspace conversation

TYPES OF ONLINE MEDIA USED IN CYBERSPACE CONVERSATION			
Social Network sites	Regularly (%)	Occasionally (%)	Rarely (%)
Facebook	74.8	17.4	7.8
Twitter	14.1	26.3	59.6
Whatsapp	87.0	7.4	5.6
Google plus	17.4	23.7	58.9
Telegram	7.4	10.7	81.9
Video apps	53.3	28.9	17.8
Youtube	58.9	30.7	10.4
Blogging apps	7.8	14.8	77.4
Tumblr	4.1	10.4	85.6
Word press	21.5	33.0	45.6
Educational apps	23.7	32.2	44.1

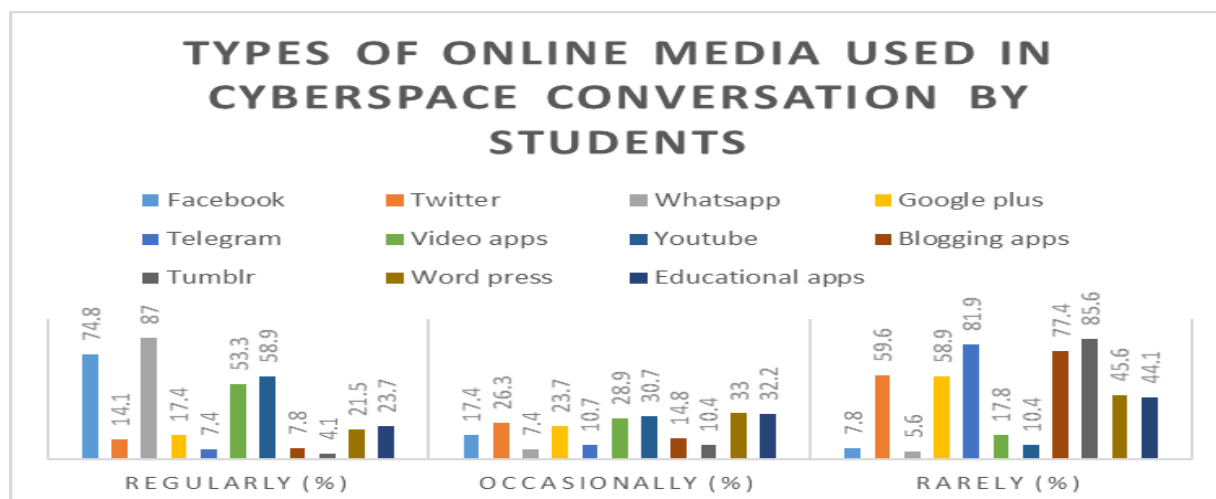


Figure 5.2

We can infer from Table 5.2 and figure 5.2 that among 270 respondents, 74.8% use Facebook regularly, 17.4% occasionally and 7.8% use rarely. 59.6% use Twitter rarely, 26.3% occasionally and 14.1% use regularly. 87% WhatsApp regularly, 7.4% occasionally and 5.6% use rarely. 58.9% Google plus rarely 23.7% occasionally and 17.4% use regularly. 81.9% use Telegram rarely 10.7% occasionally and 7.4% use regularly. 53.3% use Video apps rarely, 28.9% occasionally and 17.8% use regularly. 58.9% use You Tube regularly, 30.7% occasionally and 10.4% use rarely. 77.4% use Blogging apps rarely, 14.8% occasionally and 7.8% use regularly. 85.6% use Tumblr rarely, 10.4% occasionally and 4.1% use regularly. 45.6% use Word Press rarely, 33% occasionally and 21.5% use regularly. 44.1% use Educational apps rarely, 32.2% occasionally and 23.7% use regularly.

**Table 5.3 Purpose of using online media by students in cyberspace conversation**

<b>PURPOSE OF USING ONLINE MEDIA BY STUDENTS IN CYBERSPACE CONVERSATION</b>					
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
Leisure and personal socialization	35.2	31.5	21.1	9.3	3.0
Movies / Videos	33.3	36.3	19.6	7.8	3.0
Aimless browsing	19.6	29.3	33.7	10.7	6.7
Comments	43.7	26.7	18.9	8.5	2.2
News	32.2	43.7	13.7	5.9	4.4
English skills	23.7	36.7	22.6	8.9	8.1
Interpersonal relationships	20.4	25.2	34.8	14.8	4.8
Sharing thoughts	26.7	30.4	17.0	11.1	14.8
Information	14.8	38.1	19.3	11.9	15.9
Participation	7.0	32.2	24.1	20.4	16.3
Social issues	12.2	27.8	15.9	23.3	20.7
Dating	4.1	19.6	22.2	25.6	28.5
Self esteem	25.9	34.8	22.6	13.0	3.7
Online learning	27.0	33.7	17.4	15.2	6.7
Academic purpose	33.3	24.8	19.6	10.4	11.9
Peer to peer learning	7.0	34.4	33.0	17.0	8.5
Tutors	14.1	23.7	33.0	14.8	14.4
Reading writing skills	30.4	25.9	22.6	13.3	7.8
Research and learning	35.6	22.2	20.7	12.6	8.9
Communication with friends	30.0	33.3	18.1	10.7	7.8
Finding friends	27.4	33.0	23.0	11.5	5.2
Helping friends	15.9	41.9	16.7	13.3	12.2
Academic discussion with friends	24.1	30.4	17.0	14.8	13.7
Finding groups	14.4	38.9	21.1	11.5	14.1
Virtual meeting	14.1	33.3	21.1	13.3	18.1
Searching job	16.3	23.3	27.8	13.3	19.3
Developing an e-portfolio	17.0	17.4	33.3	18.9	13.3
Sharing information	40.4	22.6	16.7	11.5	8.9

Table 5.3 explains that among 270 respondents, 35.2% strongly agreed, 31.5% agreed, 21.1% were neutral, 9.3% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of leisure and personal socialization. 36.3% agreed, 33.3% strongly agreed, 19.6% were neutral, 7.8% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of watching Movies / Videos. 33.7% were neutral, 29.3% agreed, 19.6% strongly agreed, 10.7% disagreed and 6.7% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of aimless browsing. 43.7% strongly agreed, 26.7% agreed, 18.9% were neutral, 8.5% disagreed and 2.2% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of Comments. 43.7% agreed, 32.2% strongly agreed, 13.7% were neutral, 5.9% disagreed and 4.4% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of knowing News. 36.7% agreed, 23.7% strongly agreed, 22.6% were neutral, 8.9% disagreed and 8.1% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of English skills.

34.8% were neutral, 25.2% agreed, 20.4% strongly agreed, 14.8% disagreed and 4.8% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of interpersonal relationships. 30.4% agreed, 26.7% strongly agreed, 17% were neutral, 14.8% strongly disagreed and 11.1% disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of sharing thoughts. 38.1% agreed, 19.3% were neutral, 15.9% strongly disagreed, 14.8% strongly agreed and 11.9% agreed that they used social media for the purpose of information. 32.2% agreed, 24.1% were neutral, 20.4% disagreed, 16.3% strongly disagreed and 7% strongly agreed that they used social media for the purpose of participation. 27.8% agreed, 23.3% disagreed, 20.7% strongly disagreed, 15.9% were neutral and 12.2% strongly agreed that they used social media for the purpose of social issues. 28.5% strongly disagreed, 25.6% disagreed, 22.2% were neutral, 19.6% agreed and 4.1% strongly agreed that they used social media for the purpose of dating. 34.8% agreed, 25.9% strongly agreed, 22.6% were neutral, 13% disagreed and 3.7% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of self-esteem. 33.7% agreed, 27% strongly agreed, 17.4% were neutral, 15.2% disagreed and 6.7% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of online learning.

33.3%strongly agreed, 24.8% agreed, 19.6% were neutral, 11.9% strongly disagreed and 10.4% disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of academic purpose. 34.4% agreed, 33% were neutral, 17% disagreed, 8.5% strongly disagreed and 7% strongly agreed that they used social media for the purpose of peer to peer learning. 33% were neutral, 23.7% agreed, 14.8% disagreed, 14.4% strongly disagreed and 14.1% strongly agreed that they used social media for the purpose of tutors. 30.4%strongly agreed, 25.9% agreed, 22.6% were neutral, 13.3% disagreed and 7.8% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of reading writing skills. 35.6% strongly agreed, 22.2% agreed, 20.7% were neutral, 12.6% disagreed and 8.9% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of research and learning. 33.3% agreed, 30% strongly agreed, 18.1% were neutral, 10.7% disagreed and 7.8% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of communication with friends. 33% agreed, 27.4% strongly agreed, 23% were neutral, 11.5% disagreed and 5.2% strongly disagreed that they used social media for the purpose of finding friends.

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## 6. FINDINGS:

- 41.5% of the respondents use social media from 3-4 years, 35.6% of the respondents use social media from 1-3 years, 17.4% of the respondents use social media from 5-7 years, 4.4% of the respondents use social media from 7-10 years and only 1.1% of the respondents use social media from more than 10 years. 30% of the respondents spend time in social media for 1-2 hours, 28.5% of the respondents spend time in social media for 2-3 hours and 25.6% of the respondents spend time in social media for less than one hour, 11.1% of the respondents spend time in social media for 3-4 hours and 4.8% of the respondents spend time on social media above four hours.
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## 7. CONCLUSION:

Social media and cyberspace have had evolved many fold during the course of time and history and also since the evolution of both of these concepts. It is also to be noted that despite having non-similar beginnings somehow, there existed a scope for co-existence and wider range of aspects that could be studied under the domains of social media and cyberspace. Cyber space conversation is a no brainer for most parts and people for various walks of life. However, it has to be pointed out that despite many types of researches which were done in social media and in cyberspace the aspect of vernacular language usage especially Tamil language is pretty new and is more of a pioneering research as there are hardly studies been done in this area of research. This study was undertaken to explore the prospects of using Tamil language in cyberspace conversation. The research study revealed helped in revealing various aspects and purposes of engaging in Tamil language among the students of Periyar University, Salem. It helped the researched to look into the aspects such as the students' usage for education, peer to peer learning, dating, sharing information, watching movies and videos, online learning, academic purpose etc. Further scope of the study lies in identifying the problems faced by the students in engaging in cyberspace conversation in Tamil.

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