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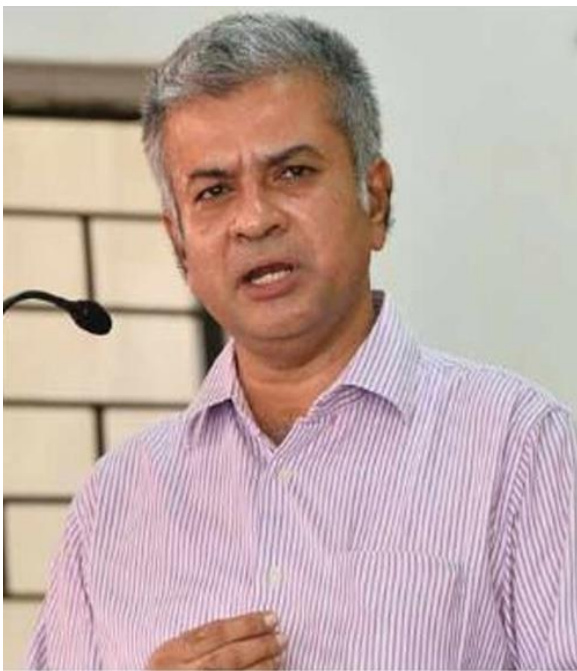
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Dr. Nitesh Saraswat

E.MBA, LL.M, Ph.D, PGDSAPM

Currently working as Assistant Professor at Law Centre II, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Dr. Nitesh have 14 years of Teaching, Administrative and research experience in Renowned Institutions like Amity University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur, Jagannath University and Nirma University.

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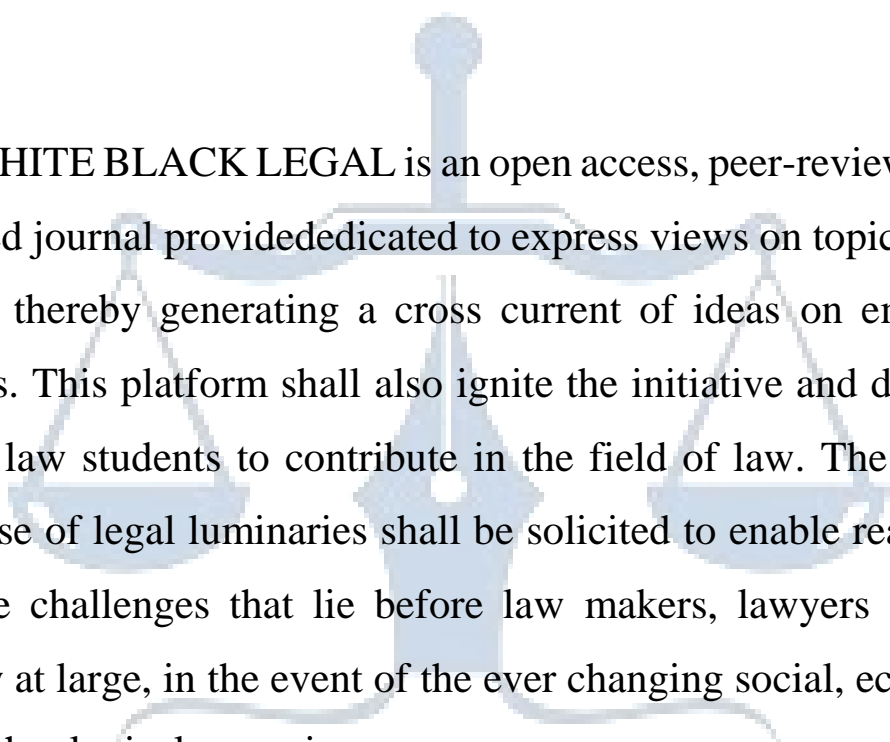


Subhrajit Chanda

BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); Ph.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.

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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provided dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you



ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ANIMAL WELFARE: PROS AND CONS

AUTHORED BY - NIKITA TIWARI¹

Research Scholar

Manipal University, Jaipur, Rajasthan

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of social media over the years has resulted in markedly distinct characteristics. Nevertheless, the "social" aspect of this media has shaped public opinion in both beneficial and detrimental ways, even with its ability to facilitate global connections. The concept of animal welfare is strikingly similar to other ethical considerations. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram have transformed into platforms that significantly disseminate the misguided treatment of animals, often misinterpreted as kind-hearted or amusing.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the Internet serves as a storehouse of significant narratives involving the courageous wildlife advocates who persist in their attempts to safeguard our world and its resources. These virtual worlds offer innovative scientific progress in conservation and enhance our involvement. This is a coalition of persons dedicated to promoting the rights and well-being of animals.

Contrary to prevalent beliefs, technology and nature are not intrinsically antagonistic, and there are several well-documented benefits to employing social media as a means to promote animal conservation initiatives. Social media's significant influence on public sentiment allows for strategic use in promoting positive outcomes in policy, law, and their implementation. In circumstances that attract significant attention, social media can expedite legislative actions and enhance campaigning for the preservation of endangered species. Social media has played a crucial role in distributing various significant petitions to a wide audience.

This article aims to clarify the role that social media platforms play in animal conservation as well as any potential drawbacks. The current government must address the necessity for suitable regulation and its consequences.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WILDLIFE CONSERVATION:-

The extensive reach and volume of social media enable it to effectively spread conservation messages and act as a crucial instrument for fostering social change in the pursuit of biodiversity conservation. The social media can significantly improve public engagement in pro-conservation actions, increase funding for conservation efforts, and encourage changes in policy. On the other hand, social media can lead to significant increases in tourism in protected regions, encourage anti-conservation behaviors by spreading false information, and aid in the illegal trade and exploitation of species.

It has been demonstrated in many situations that social media information sharing had no discernible impact on conservation efforts; nonetheless, in this essay, we aim to highlight examples where considerable conservation impact was attained and where it did not. This study links the positive and negative effects of social media to psychological factors that may influence conservation initiatives. It also addresses the constraints of our findings. Social media administrators, public users, nonprofit organizations, and regulatory bodies can implement techniques to reduce conservation risks and foster beneficial outcomes. Through enhanced communication, regulation of online conduct, and provision of pragmatic guidance, social media can substantially advance the objectives of animal conservation.¹

SOCIAL NETWORKING FACILITATES WILDLIFE CONSERVATION; CONSERVATION INITIATIVES MODIFY HUMAN CONDUCT:-

A notable aspect of social media is its ability to influence consumer behavior through digital advertising, product reviews, and online word-of-mouth communication. People's actions influence market demand. If social media makes people more aware of the effects of products that aren't sustainable or are harmful for the environment, and people change how they consume to lessen these effects, the benefits could be big.

INSTANCES LIKE USE OF “SINGLE-USE PLASTIC”:-

Moreover, there was a significant increase in inquiries on the term "single-use plastic" after mid-2017, reflecting a heightened awareness of the harmful effects of plastic. Campaign managers must initiate or persist in developing messages that encourage consumers to

¹ Staff, O. (no date) *Social media wildlife selfies pose threat to animals: Recent study*, Outlook Traveller. Available at: <https://www.outlooktraveller.com/whats-new/social-media-wildlife-selfies-pose-threat-to-animals-recent-study> (Accessed: 25 December 2024).

reevaluate their entire connection with single-use plastics, as plastic straws constitute but a minor aspect of the plastic pollution issue.

SOCIAL MEDIA HELPED ANIMAL SHELTERS AND POTENTIAL ADOPTERS-:

Animal shelters and prospective adopters are connected through social media channels. They provide a venue for shelters to list animals for adoption so that potential adopters can easily view them from the comfort of their own homes. Additionally, social media marketing is essential for animal shelters to reach a wider audience and increase the possibility of adoption. Social media significantly increases the awareness of needy animals, making it easier for prospective adopters to find the perfect partner. Participation Users can enhance the visibility of their postings on their channels by engaging with others through likes, shares, and comments. For shelters operating on a tight budget, this natural reach is crucial. Progress in the community through social media, animal shelters can establish and nurture a network of advocates who disseminate information, make financial donations, and provide assistance.

CROWDFUNDING AND SUPPORT GATHERED BY SOCIAL MEDIA-:

Furthermore, social media channels are an ideal way for shelters to undertake fundraising campaigns. Crowdfunding efforts can help to cover the costs of running a shelter, providing veterinary care to animals, and meeting other basic needs. Social media can efficiently promote fundraising initiatives, thereby increasing support and cash contributions. Volunteer Recruitment social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram can be used to find volunteers, spread information about helping stray animals, and rally public support for the cause.

DISSEMINATION OF ACCURATE INFORMATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEDIA PROFESSIONALS -:

It is crucial to provide accurate information to the media in order to avoid biased reporting and inaccurate facts and analyses. To guarantee fact-based reporting, the forest department should constantly give the media accurate facts and figures, not just in times of need. For frequent meetings, forest officials may choose local and national media representatives from a range of media outlets that cover environmental and conservation issues. To assist media

professionals in comprehending an incident and subsequently producing sensitive media content grounded in factual data, forest officials may be accessible for commentary, replies, and the provision of essential images and information pertaining to a specific news item.²

THE ODISHA GOVERNMENT PROHIBITED TAKING OF SELFIES AND PHOTOGRAPHS WITH WILD ANIMALS-:

A significant infringement of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 involves capturing selfies and photographs of specific wild animal species, their carcasses, body parts, and trophies. According to senior forest officials from the wildlife division, the act, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison, aims to deter people from taking selfies and photos with wild animals, which is against the 1972 Act's provisions and has led to many deaths. Individuals are circulating photographs of endangered species on social media, as communicated by PCCF Wildlife and Chief Wildlife Warden Susanta.

Nanda addressed all Divisional Forest Officers, the Deputy Directors of Similipal South and North Divisions, and Nandankanan Zoological Park. This action contravenes the Wildlife Protection Act and interrupts the natural life cycle of animals; the offender is subject to a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment.

The PCCF asserted that disseminating photographs or selfies featuring deceased wildlife, their body parts, or trophies on social media contravenes Section 39(1)(a) of the Wildlife Protection Act and may incur penalties.³

The PCCF Wildlife told DFOs and deputy directors of protected areas to strictly enforce the order. This means that forest staff must catch dishonest people who are trying to get famous by breaking the law and bring them to the attention of the courts.

The PCCF Wildlife instructed forest personnel to raise public awareness and discourage individuals from photographing or taking selfies with designated animal species. The Forest

² Roy, S. (2023) *Role of social media in conservation, Wildlife SOS*. Available at: <https://wildlifesos.org/chronological-news/role-of-social-media-in-conservation/> (Accessed: 25 December 2024).

³ Service, E.N. (no date) *In a first, odisha government bans selfies with scheduled animals, The New Indian Express*. Available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2024/Mar/16/in-a-first-odisha-government-bans-selfies-with-scheduled-animals> (Accessed: 25 December 2024).

Department emphasized that individuals wishing to photograph wildlife must comply with existing regulations and obtain permission from forest officials. The government has directed the DFOs and deputy directors to prominently exhibit hotline numbers in many locations and on social media to improve information dissemination.

THE NATIONAL HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT MITIGATION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN OF INDIA (HWC-NAP)-:

The media serves as a vital stakeholder adept at conveying the intended message on HWC mitigation to the public. It states that, despite a trend in media coverage over the past decade toward a more issue-oriented approach, the media predominantly reports on HWC only in the event of an incident. Priority must be accorded to fostering constructive conversation between media professionals and wildlife managers, reaching consensus on rules, and identifying the critical elements of engaging the media as partners in mitigating human-animal conflict.

The media can significantly contribute to human-wildlife conflict (HWC) mitigation by disseminating pertinent information, reporting on the dispute, and informing the public about current activities and necessary future actions. The media may emphasize the importance of conservation efforts in sustaining a healthy environment and the ecosystem services that underpin human livelihoods and overall well-being, along with the advantageous coexistence of wildlife and humans.⁴

The National Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan (HWC-NAP) of India identifies the media as a crucial player in disseminating important information regarding HWC mitigation to the public. It states that, despite a trend in media coverage over the past decade toward a more issue-oriented approach, the media predominantly reports on HWC only in the event of an incident. It is essential to emphasize effective communication between media professionals and wildlife managers, establish rules, and identify key areas for engaging the media as partners in mitigating human-animal conflict.

The media may significantly contribute to HWC mitigation by disseminating pertinent

⁴ Riyan Ramanath V / Mar 16, 2024 (no date) *Seo warning: Taking selfies with endangered animals is a punishable offence: Bhubaneswar News - Times of India, The Times of India*. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/seo-warning-taking-selfies-with-endangered-animals-is-a-punishable-offence/articleshow/108536934.cms> (Accessed: 25 December 2024).

information, reporting on the conflict, and informing the public about current strategies, ongoing initiatives, and necessary future actions. By emphasizing the potential for harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife, the media may underscore the importance of conservation initiatives in preserving a healthy environment and the ecosystem services that underpin human livelihoods and overall well-being.

LEGAL AND POLICY STRUCTURE FOR EXECUTING THE GUIDELINES -:

India has a multitude of laws, rules, and directives that regulate news media and related entities. The print media has a specific code of ethics designed to safeguard press freedom and uphold the editorial standards of newspapers and magazines.

The changing dynamics of journalism and the emergence of social media need that present legislation and standards support media practitioners in self-regulation while simultaneously assisting forestry sector personnel in optimizing processes.

The media can obtain pertinent legislation and regulations from the (MIB) website. In accordance with the MIB listing Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, as well as the News Broadcasting Standards Regulation, the NBA established the News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA) for news organizations to adhere to. The public may file complaints with the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) concerning non-news and entertainment channels, and self-regulatory procedures exist to oversee content, violations, and broadcasts on private television channels.

The Press Council of India operates as a self-regulatory entity, diligently overseeing journalistic malfeasance and maintaining ethical standards in the profession. The Press Council Act of 1978 permits any anyone to submit a grievance against a magazine for violations of ethical and journalistic standards, including a provision for email complaints.

The Department of Electronics and Information Technology within the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology has produced a framework and standards for government entities' use of social media. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA) mandates that the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) appoint an official spokesperson from

the Forest Department to regularly inform the media, or as necessary, to prevent the dissemination of misinformation regarding operations or incidents related to human-wildlife conflict (HWC). Sensationalism or distortion might exacerbate the problem.⁵

CONCLUSION:-

The media can significantly enhance public awareness of wildlife issues. It can influence and shape public opinions and attitudes. Newspapers often provide articles, news, and information regarding wildlife inhabiting both natural and anthropogenic environments, as well as species that have adapted to urban proximity. Electronic media also reports on these stories with significant interest. Press coverage amplifies its influence in highly sensitive HWC settings. The public is polarized over the "human versus wildlife" issue, both online and within local communities.

To avert the dissemination of narratives that sensationalize, mislead, or misinform, media outlets and journalists must ensure fact-based reporting. Media professionals must ensure that the information sources they utilize are credible when collecting data for their media products. In reporting on the subject, it may be necessary to verify all facts and obtain input from pertinent forest department representatives and other individuals involved in the incident. Wildlife narratives gain rapid popularity owing to significant attention and readership. Media professionals must engage with forest officers, researchers, and field practitioners to produce media products that employ a holistic approach, assuring the quality of their output while maintaining a consistent supply of stories.

In reporting on HWC, electronic media can avoid sensationalism by utilizing balanced headlines, background information, and textual styles. This will mitigate the potential for news to amplify the local population's apprehension around wildlife, which could result in heightened risk perceptions and ultimately foster intolerance and hate towards it.

The difficulties of reducing conflicts between humans and animals vary from landscape to landscape because of things like the way the landscape is set up, the socioeconomic situation,

⁵ TNN / Updated: Aug 31, 2021 (no date) *Social media companies urged to stop promoting videos of Cruelty to Animals: Chennai News - Times of India, The Times of India*. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/social-media-companies-urged-to-stop-promoting-videos-of-animal-cruelty/articleshow/85792979.cms> (Accessed: 25 December 2024).

the stage of development, the history of animal conflict and conservation issues, and how people currently see threats from animals. Once they get the information they need from the forest department and other experts, media representatives may want to note this difference and report it correctly.



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