IMPACT OF DIGITAL LIFE ON PRE-INTERNET GENERATION

Communication Design Project II
DEP - 702

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Acknowledgement

Abstract

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Social media, mobile phones or smart gadgets, in general, have changed the way we live our lives, especially for people who belong to pre-internet generation. The way we interact and communicate with one another is not the same now. These smart gadgets have not only become a key part of our modern lifestyle but also influences our day-to-day lives.

Technology use is different in different cases. Some people struggle to use these high-tech gadgets, whereas for some it is relatively easy. Some adopt tech to conduct business and others use the same to spread rumors and create unwanted attention.

Having said that, I intend to demonstrate through this project a comical approach to experiences involving smart devices used by pre and p ost-Internet generation via webcomics in a middle class Indian family system.

I also aim to raise sensitvity about the effects of internet, social media and smart devices. How they have become dominant over the past few years, and how the pre-internet generation has come to terms with it.

Content

Introduction

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Why I chose this project?

I have seen my parents and grandparents struggling with social media, internet and with technology in general, be it smartphones, smart wearables or internet. I found that a lot of other people could relate to this too. I wanted to comment in a satirical and comical way, using my skills to write short snippets and visually illustrate content for the same.

Background before topic selection:

During my last few visits back home, I had noticed a change in behaviour of my mother after she sharted using a smartphone, and particularly because of few applications she uses regularly. She is a housewife and after doing her chores by afternoon she has a lot of free time to kill.

Initially, she used to involve herself in some activity or another, but since last year when we gifted her a smartphone, she has been spending a lot of time on it. We now think that the gift might not have been a good

idea now owing to her new-found beliefs through internet. She lately spends a lot of time on Youtube, and she watches anything and everything Youtube AI suggests her to watch, and her opinion changes on the basis of news she watches which may or may not be biased.

In the digital era when we have anything at only a click of a button, it becomes challenging to track whether the knowledge obtained is positive or wrong, so it becomes challenging for our parents who have an understanding about how such things function.

I have seen my parents and grandparents struggling with social media, internet and with technology in general, be it smart phones, smart wearables or the internet.

Effects of Social Media

The release of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Whatsapp and Instagram has influenced the social culture heavily and changed the way we view ourselves and others.

The release of social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Snapchat*, *Whatsapp* and *Instagram* has influenced the social culture heavily and changed the way we view ourselves and others.

Walk down any high street and around 70 percent will be on mobile devices and clutch one as if it were a newborn child, raising serious concerns about the overall impact cell phones have on our lives in general.

Social media is one of the easiest ways of finding or communicating with new people with similar views, since social media helps you locate communities based on your interests and other demographics. This can be not only perfect for meeting new friends but also find love interests and make instant connections as seen through *Tinder*'s popularity becoming the standard to meet new people.

Social media is an excellent way to rapidly spread the news around the world and 'good news' posts earn hundreds of thousands of retweets in minutes. This can be incredibly useful if people can find important information, for instance, climate forecasts or lost children, etc.

Image source: leapfrog media

As described earlier, the main advantage of social media is that information can be transmitted to millions in a very short period. While in a crisis, it can be seen as incredibly beneficial, it can also be a big disadvantage, as no reliable data can be exchanged instantly. This may lead to serious confusion and fear.

Social media can get addictive in the sense that people tend to update their constant activities wherever they are and have people respond to their updates irrespective of how important their activity is. Such as a person, posting a picture of whatever s/he is eating to the public and provide themselves with entertainment through constant interacton with people.

Impact of social media on various fields

With the increase in technology, social media has become the norm for all. People are addicted every day to buy better smart devices.

The impact on people is unique in various areas. The performance and level of interaction between students have been improved by social media. Business uses social media to improve the performance of a product in different ways, for instance, to achieve its business objectives and raise annual sales. Young people are seen every day in touch with the press.

There are several positives of social media, but they also have some demerits that negatively affect individuals. False information may lead the education system to problems, inaccurate advertising in an organisation will affect profitability. Social media may exploit society through the violation of the privacy of the citizens.

It is great that the social media is used, but should be used judiciously.

Social media can get addictive in the sense that people tend to update their constant activities wherever they are and have people respond to their updates irrespective of how important their activity is. Such as a person, posting a picture of whatever s/he is eating to the public and provide themselves with entertainment through constant interacton with people.

Effects of Smartphones

Initially, smartphones were considered only for business use because of their costs and requirements, but today we are in a frenetic Mobile industry, which has many mobile manufacturers offering a variety of advanced features and services on a hardware item. Even a 7 years old has a smartphone today!

Interoperability and the use of products and features from every field are transformative for the integration of connectivity and computation to wireless consumer devices.

The smartphones are the leading tools in this convergence phase, which take the lead and play the role of a standard mobile terminal. The term smartphone has been introduced into the market as a marketing strategy, referring to a new mobile category that provides

integrated services from the communication, software and internet industries, including voice communication, email, personal information management apps and wireless communications.

A smartphone is, in fact, a mobile device with specialized features and capabilities other than standard devices, such as phone calls and text messages. The smartphones are equipped with the ability to view images, play games, play video, browse, cast digital screen, play and capture audio/video, send and receive an e-mail, embed mobile software and surf the web also are equipped with wireless internet and many other features. Becoming a common choice for customers along with business usage is now for the same purposes as the mobile is initially intended for commercial users only.

Initially, smartphones were considered only for business use because of their costs and requirements, but today we are in a frenetic Mobile industry, which has many mobile manufacturers offering a variety of advanced features and services on a hardware item.
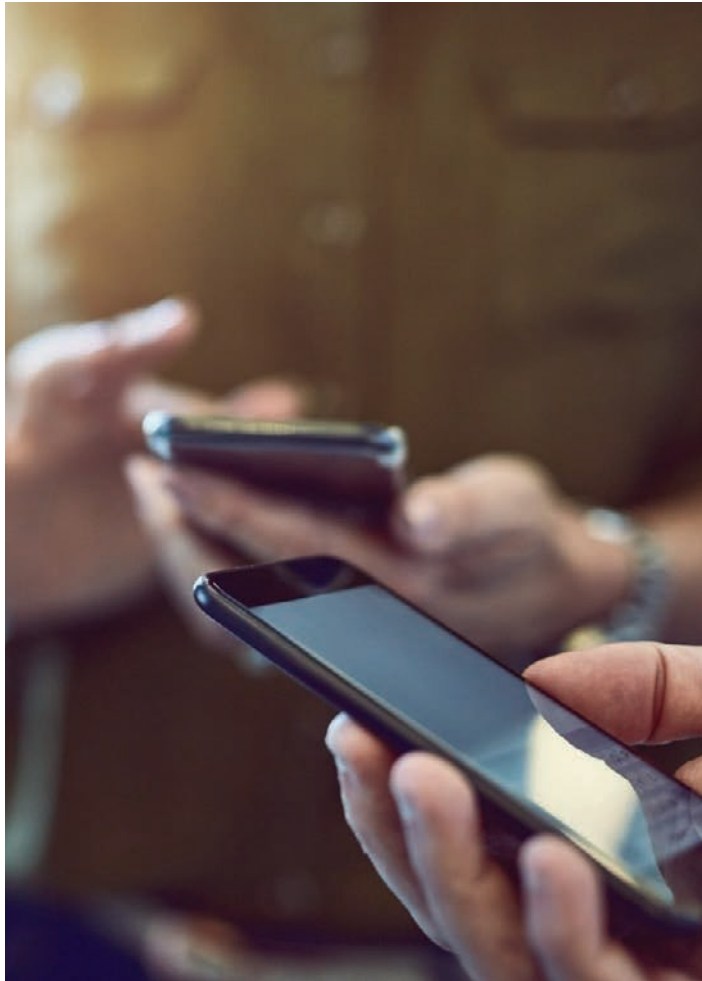
Image source: uchealth today

Smartphones have influenced just about every part of human life. Prominent places where the smartphones affected trade, schooling, health and social life. The cultural norms and behavior of people has changed dramatically in emerging technology. The effects are both positive and negative. Smartphones encourage people to create their micro-cultures and to participate in socially dangerous activities, and smartphones enable people to remain linked at all times.

Source: Sarwar, M. & Rahim Soomro, T. (2013). Impact of smartphones on society.

Smartphones have influenced just about every part of human life. Prominent places where the smartphones affected trade, schooling, health and social life. The cultural norms and behavior of people has changed dramatically in emerging technology.

Secondary Research

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I started this project taking on the case of my mother relying on all internet sources and generating beliefs out of them.

Using this case, I started observing more people and their behiavor as a result of smartphone use. From my casual general observations I have noticed that most people tend to look at their phones while eating their food, and hence reducing the social interaction to a large extent in their immediate surroundings.

By reading a few articles on internet and through my interactions with people from midlle and upper middle classes, I conclude that most of these people use their gadgets (mainly smartphones) on a daily basis.

I am focusing my area of interest for this project to upper-middle and lower-middle class families, as I come from this section of the society and most of my interaction is with them only. So, I know how their daily life looks like and therefore I can bring out snippets from their life much more effectively.

From my casual general observations I have noticed that most people tend to look at their phones while eating their food, and hence reducing the social interaction to a large extent in their immediate surroundings.

Getting a better picture:

To add better knowledge to my current perspectives, I saw a few bollywood films which are based on this section of the society.

For example, the movie 'Do dooni chaar' showcases a challenges that middle class families go through and how happy they are despite the challenges. Even the idea of owning a car surprises their friends and family members. Whereas, in the movie 'Rajma chawal' after the demise of his wife, the protagonist's father tries to get closer to him using social media and end up creating fake profiles on the internet. But in the end,

social interaction helps the family instead of social media interaction.

The movies 'Dum laga ke haisha' and 'Sui dhaaga' creates a beautiful persona of an Indian middle-class family. Both the films shows the newlywed couples facing problems in the initial days of their marriage, but in the later part of the story, they emerge as a strong team. These movies supported my views and instilled confidence to my existing perspectives.

Image source: imdb, netflix and youtube

Brown Paperbag consists of gag-a-day pages that draw from mundane situations within a stereotypical Indian family.

Image source: brown paperbag comics

Webcomics by various artists:

I have been following a number of artists on *Instagram* and *Webtoon* who share their personal take on what is happening around them or in their own personal lives for instance, and narrate the same in forms of short snippets and comic strips. Some of them create single-frame comics and some have multi-frame format.

For example, the webcomic '*Brown Paperbag*' by Sailesh Gopalan is based on the unvarnished realities of everyday life. *Brown Paperbag* consists of gag-a-day pages which pull in a stereotypical Indian family from boring circumstances. The webcomic often centers on two depressed teens, Kabir and Ananya, who sometimes have to contend with their overprotective and disruptive kin. In an interview, Gopalan states that "I *tried to portray society as it truly is, without the mask people put on. Looking at old videos, you'll see brown paper bags with two cut eyeholes in them that characters placed over their heads to cover.*"

Brown Paperbag discusses people's attitudes in Indian society, rather than criticizing the individuals in control. The protagonists tend to be generic in his stories, though not based around any real community of men. As such, *Brown Paperbag* usually exaggerates the stereotypical societal positions given to adults, teens and siblings.

The visual execution of the webcomic is through simple lines depicting the overall structure of the human characters or of the objects and color scheme is often monochromatic. Only a time when the emphsis is to be given to a certain thing or character, a colorful treatment is given.

On the other hand, *Lunarbaboon* webcomics delivers humor subtly. But, most of the time the comic portrays various ways how to be happy in any situation. The content is positivity driven. The tagline of '*Lunarbaboon*' goes like 'slice of life'. And the webcomic website states that *Lunarbaboon* is a half man/half moon monkey trying to make sense of it all.

The visual execution of the webcomic is through simple lines depicting the overall structure of the human characters or of the objects and color scheme is often monochromatic. Only a time when the emphasis is to be given to a certain thing, the creator gives that certain frame or the character a colorful treatment. And for most of the comic strips, Christopher Grady, the creator goes along with the narrative with four to six frame snippets.

Image source: lunarbaboon comics

Dar prefers visual humour to words, his lines are precise and sure. Dar's cartoons are a running commentary on the tardiness and apathy of government functionaries, superstitions, the unreliability of the government transport system and so on.

Sudhir Dar's cartoons take a critical look at contemporary social and political moves, using humour either to expose out shortcomings and lapses or simply to raise a few laughs. Dar's attitude to satire is more subtle than other cartoonists.

Dar chooses visual comedy over language, his lines are precise and sure. Dar's cartoons are a running commentary on the tardiness and apathy of government functionaries, superstitions, literal-mindedness, the unreliability of the government transport system, fan clubs, fashion and so on.

Image source: google, the telegraph

"THE BRITISH HAVE SUCH A CIVILIZED WAY OF EXPRESSING THINGS..!"

"MY DELEGATION AND I ARE HAPPY TO BE IN THE BEAUTIFUL CITY OF DELHI.."

"THE JOB IS VERY CHALLENGING BUT I DIDN'T EXPECT SO MUCH SECURITY..!"

"CHEERS!"

Primary Research

Interviewing people for first time and asking them about their digital life experience was difficult, since many of them were not comfortable sharing their experience episodes with a stranger.

So, I reached out to my peers to get stories from their lives. And it was interesting to find that most of them were directly or indirectly impacted by their digital lives. Many of them also shared that the digital technology influences their grandparents and, in some cases, their parents.

A lot of them talked about usage scenarios of *Whatsapp* family groups and how applications like these have changed how their parents/grandparents are connected to the world. Some of the stories narrate the positive sides, while the others on negative sides of these services and technology in general.

As one of the interviewee stated *"Technology has enabled me to learn so much about so many subjects in the form of online tutorials and webinars and connecting me to the very best of mentors and experts. Technology can be really*

effective mood booster for example its amazing how we have a physical response to the pictures of baby animals we see online and oxytocin and dompamine hormones are released and while playing games dopamine and serotonin are actively engaged throughout the whole experience.That said, I think we should not hand in the control of our lives to these modern gadgets be a slave to technology as all these fascinating features come at a price and can cause physical, mental and emotional problems if not used reasonably and in moderation."
– Prasoon Dhapola, Student, IIT Hyderabad

"Modern Technology allows me to share information quickly with my relatives living in other cities and states, using social media. I can stay updated on their major life events, such as weddings, family trips and vacations, job placements of the youngsters in our family, their academic and other acheivements. One thing I fear, however, is the safety ot our kids. who upload a lot of information on social media, which could be misused."
– Jai Singh Dhillon, Ex-Airforce

Interviewee: Prasoon Dhapola, Student, IIT Hyderabad

"I find my physical and mental health deteriorating after spending a lot of time on digital technology. So i have made it a point to spend more time and energy on physical activity and exercise to combat the damaging effects of excessive screen time, such as posture, mental fatigue and straining in the eyes. I prefer to engage more in face to face social interaction as opposed to online interaction and strive to strike a balancewhere technology can be used to make life easier but not make us lazy or unhealthy."
- Pulkit Sharma, Swimming-coach, SMS Stadium, Jaipur

Based on conversations with these people, following points were noted:

Social media and smart gadgets have already penetrated in our lifestyle, and there's nothing much which we can do about it, except reduce the usage. Data consumption is controlled by ourselves, so it's better to spend time checking for information on social media platforms, rather than wasting everything.

Fake news is something which concerns a lot of people, so one should look out for such news and not believe whatever they see or hear on internet.

Inference

Based on the bollywood movies that I watched, I pictured an Indian middle-class family around which my webcomic stories will revolve. And to get a better idea of interactions in an Indian household, I am going to depict a family of six (gandparents, parents and two children) living an urban life in my webcomic. There would be interaction scenarios between the children and their teachers, their parents and grandparents, as well as with their old aged neighbours.

Studying the comics by various artists in India I observed that a lot of their work were political based, Therefore, I shall not cover politics as there are already enough comics in India. But I shall be exploring the behaviour of people who belong to pre and post-internet generation in a single household setting.

The style of the characters will be simple, so as to give people more time on reading the expressions of those, instead of spending the same on the detailing and coloring.

Other reason for making simplified comic characters being, the recallable factors attached to simplified and unique figures.

The medium to reach out audience will be internet and social media platforms, to maximise the reach, as most of the audience I am targetting is using smartphones. And I'll try to post these episodes on a regular period, which will help in making better association of characters to the audience.

Design Exploration

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The first step was to get the characters of the family in place, so as to start executing the narratives into final visuals in the form of short comic panels.

Character design:

In order to make all the characters of my comic simple and distinguishable from one another, I kept the shape of the head different for all of them. And to give Indianness to the characters I made use of elements like bindi, nose rings and ear rings in case of women. And for men, I tried to do the same by playing with their hairstyle and facial hair.

I started with the main character of the comic, who is a teenager, 14-15 years old, and is a school going kid who loves technology. Then moved to visualise the second most important character, i.e. sister of the boy. She is a recent graduate from college and is around 21-22 years old. She owns almost all new cool gadgets which comes to the market. She wears earrings, a pair of spectacles and a hair clip all the time.

The reason mentioning the brother-sister duo as main characters is their frequent appearances in almost all of the comic strips along with a third person who falls into pre-internet generation to show contrast between the two generations and different use case scenarios.
I chose to show atleast one person from both the categories. This provides enough scope for generating interesting conversations, which can be converted into funny narratives.

After finalising on the character design, the next step was rendering process. After drawing a few rough drafts, I shortlisted the above four options. The left most rendering style is raw. I have provided sufficient appeal to make the characters look lively as possible.

However, considering the time available and the medium through which I aim to circulate my comics, I chhose the last option which allows me to draw a larger number of strips/stories which would come in handy to collect audience feedback. Also the last option gives me freedom to add color and texture to the characters.
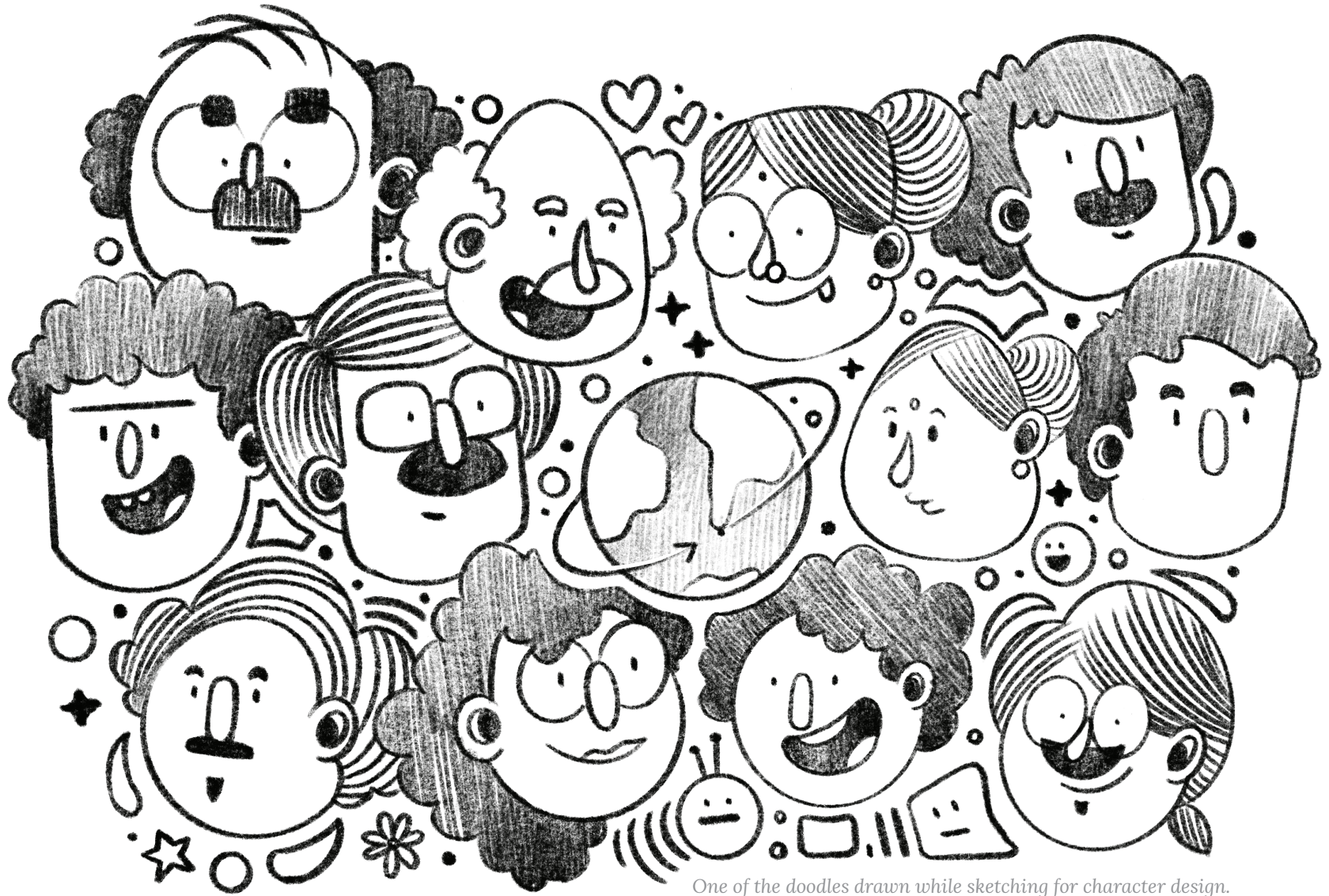
One of the doodles drawn while sketching for character design.

Structure of the family that I portraying in comic strips is such that some of them are heavy technology users and others aren't. And the snippets are based on their interaction. A short description about each one of them as described by Guddu (Main character of the narratives) is as follows:

"My Dada is a retired army man and in his 70s! Nowadays he's not that active. But there were days when we used to go for long walks and sometimes even play outdoors! He'd pick me up from school and on the way home he'll let me eat ice cream candy and will come for my PT meetings when Papa would be busy. He's usually confused with the new tech, but he's getting used to it".

Let me tell you about my Dadi a bit. She's in her mid 60s and yet a powerhouse! She was a school principal when Dada was serving in the Indian army. She would tell me stories about the different places she lived in when Dada used to get transferred. She's quite smart! But sometimes I get surprised by the way she uses technology for doing stuff! Now a days, she is mostly occupied with teaching kids in the neighborhood. She recently started using Whatsapp, and is quite proud of it, as she was the only one left in her friend circle who wasn't on that platform."

"My mother is a housewife. She was a teacher once but soon left the job after she gave birth to my elder sister. There was a time when she used to hate technology, at least that's what I assume when she'd scold me for spending too much time on phone or iPad. But, times have changed! Now, I've to tell her not to use her phone too much. She's on social media platforms, but doesn't know if the content she's consuming is genuine or not! And that influences her a lot. I've to tell her that some content is fake and not good for her, but she won't listen. But recently she has started using a fitness application, and the same smart-tech is helping her lead a healthy life!"

"Now, let me introduce you to my Papa! He's a businessman, and owns a small shop of gems in the city. He's mostly there for the major chunk of the day and usually takes a day off on Mondays. He's pretty chill with me using phone, but he himself doesn't like using smart-tech and keeps himself distant from such stuff. This one time he accidentally broadcasted a public message on WhatsApp which was meant for a colleague, and has since regretted doing it!"
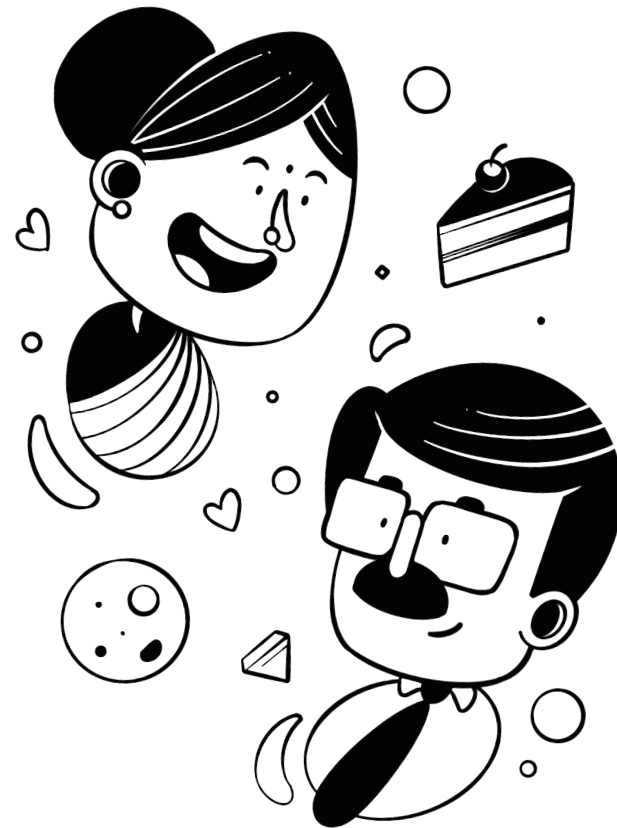
Illustration: Character sketches of mother and father of Guddu
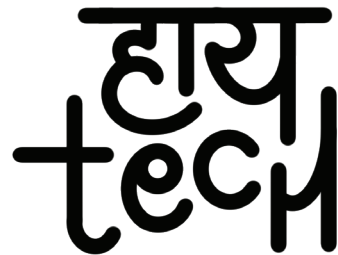
"Talking about my elder sister, she just graduated from college and is damn smart! She stood first in the university. She's also pretty good with technology. She owns a lot of smart gadgets and replaces those with newer ones whenever there's a new launch, that sometimes concerns my Dada, he doesn't understand the concept of buying new stuff every now and then! She's working as a junior architect in a local firm. I love her workstation, it's totally beast! Sometimes she lets me use it, and that's more than enough for me!"

"Finally! I get to tell about myself. My name is Guddu, and I'm in 10th standard. Still studying and aspiring to be an astronaut after I saw the recent news about Chandrayan on Instagram! Just imagine if I become one, I'll have so many followers. Even Vrinda will start following me, she'll have to! Then I'll show Rajeev who's a stud. Anyways, I've an old phone which I get to keep daily for an hour after school and on weekends when I've tuition classes Maa let me keep it for the day, she's afraid that I'll get lost. I have my own smart-watch by the way! It's a second hand though, which belonged to Didi and she gifted it to me, plus it's an Apple and everyone at school finds it pretty cool!"

Illustration: Character sketches of Guddu and his sister

After doing secondary research, I inferred that the name should be crisp and easy to remember.

The initial ideas were lengthy and were not quite memorable. For example, 'Nex-gen tech for Ex-gen users' meaning new technology for old generation people. Other examples being 'Old and wise versus Smart device', again trying to incorporate an element of technology into the naming of the comic. A different approach was to use pun words in the naming, the use of the same might help in helping the readers remember the name better, as well as it will help convey different sets of meaning through a single word. So, I had come up with 'PhaseBook' in which phase stands for generation, and the overall sound of the word resembles to FaceBook, but that did not make it into the final list based on feedback.

I came up with another name 'Haye-tech'. When written in hindi, the word 'haye' along with tech conveys two meanings, one being 'hi/hello' or greetings to technology. While the other being 'what have you done to us technology, we are devastated by your presence'. This name for the comic seemed interesting, so I went ahead with this option, and created a custom logotype for 'Haye-tech'.

Comic book cover:

The cover was designed once I was done with a dozen of short snippets for the comic series. Going with flow of the comic strips, I kept a similar rendering style for the cover page of the comic book as well.

The one on the right is the first version of the cover. The idea behind this one was to depict all the characters, which the reader will encounter while reading the comic strips on the front side, while the back-side of the cover is filled with characters whose appearance is limited in the episodes.

The expressions of the central characters is representing what each of them feel about technology, for some it's the welcoming side of 'haye' and for some it's the contrary. Complementing the characters are the smart gadgets and popular smartphone applications.

Cover of the comic book
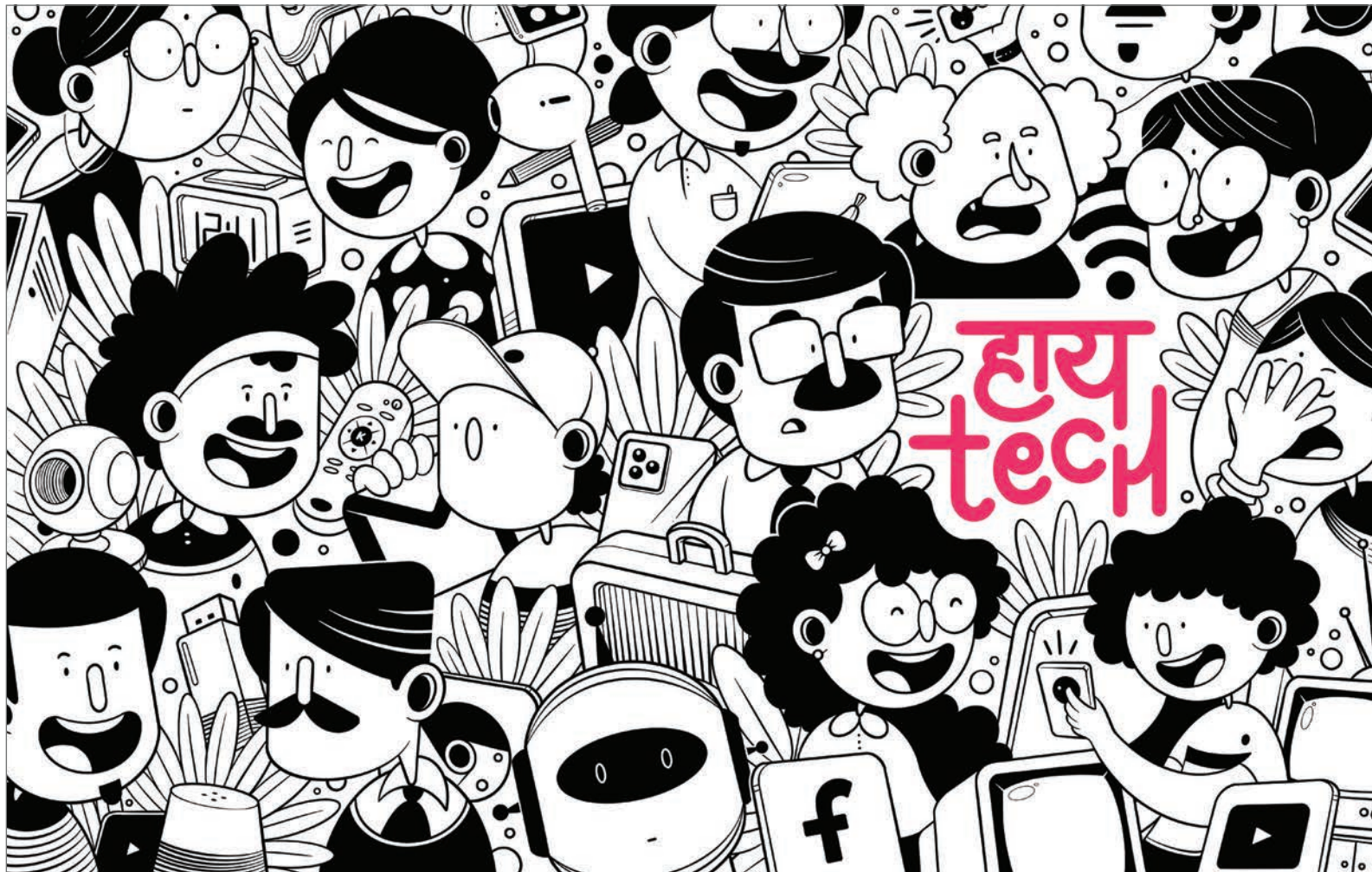
Front and back sides of "haye-tech" comic book

Comic Panels

The strips in my comic narratives are multi-framed, and range from two to five frames. And I have kept the text portion restricted, based on the inferences created. And the conversations in most strips are between two characters, and in some places it goes up to three. Also, in certain episodes I have kept an entire one frame for showing exaggeration and expression of the characters.
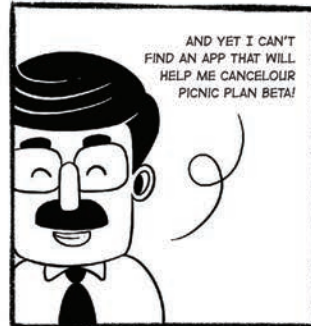
Apart from one on the right, a few examples of the comic strips I have made are on the following pages.
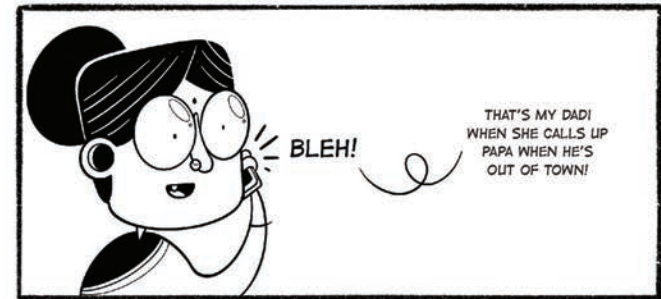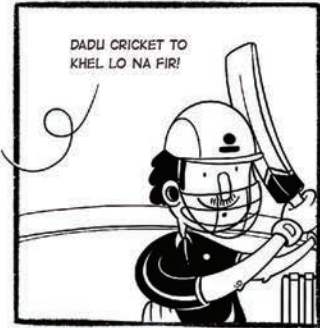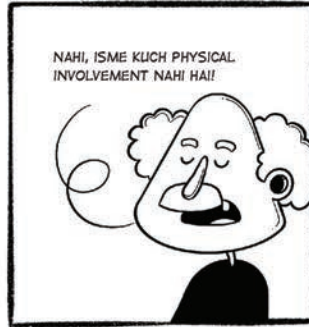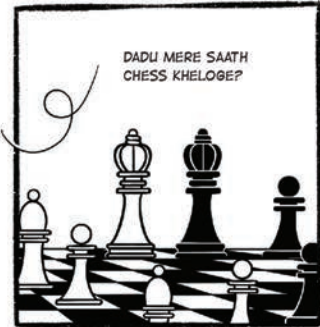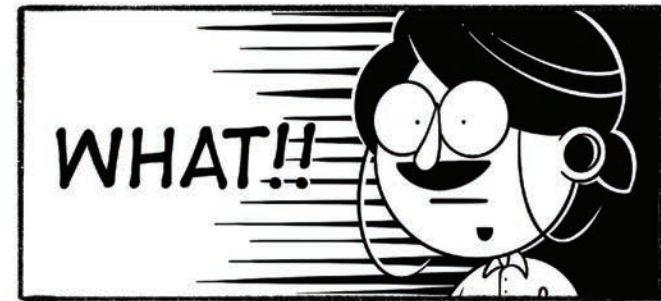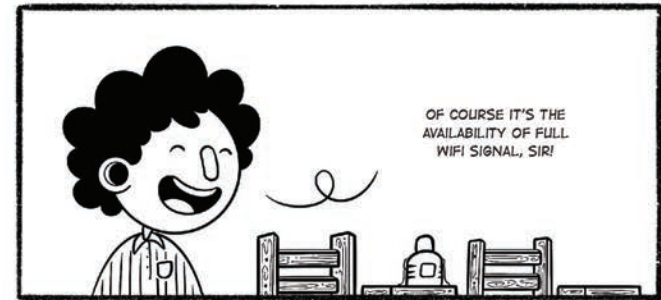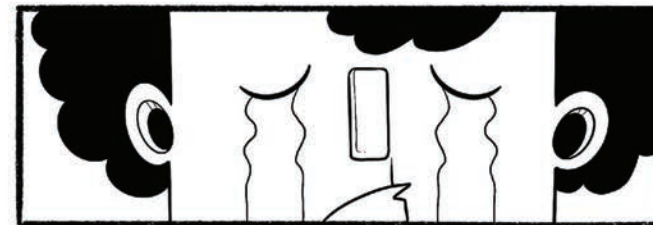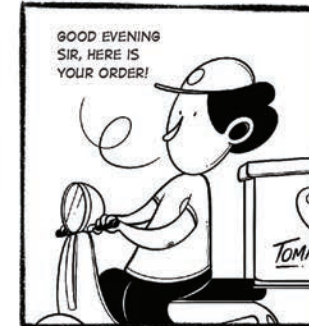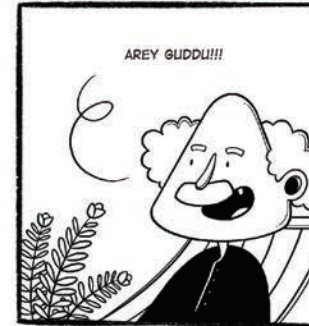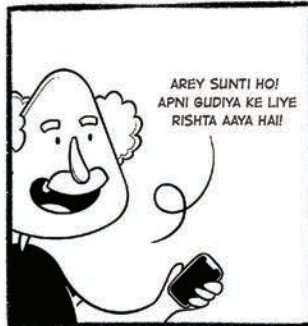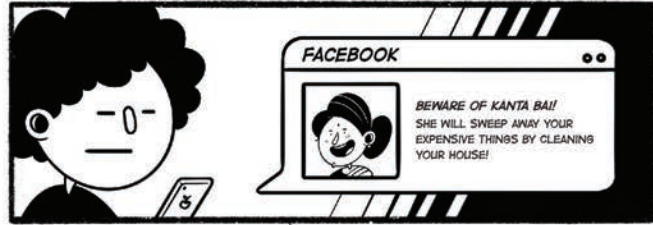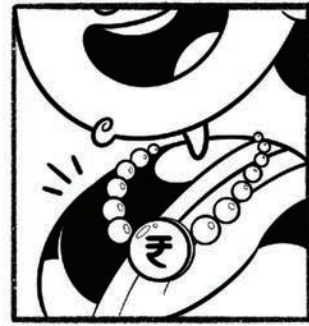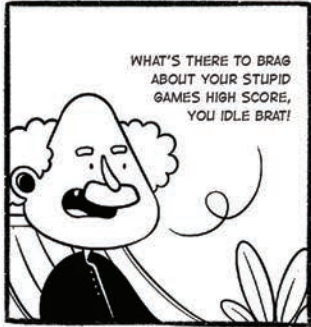
Testimonials

I find the comics, "haye-tech" entertaining, relatable and very relevant to our society and everyday life. The way it captures the bewilderment of the older generation when introduced to modern gadgets and the internet is on point.

"When I started reading "haye-tech" I couldn't stop…
I went through all of them in a single go. Utkarsh has done a brilliant job…this cartoon series made my days easy and helped me to realize how simple and funny is our life. Let me tell you the truth that I got addicted to this series. Eagerly waiting for the next episodes! :)"
– Sangeeth Sankar, Student, IIT Bombay

"I had found that you have adopted and maintained your unique style in these comics as well. I might have felt a little lost with Hindi-English translations. Good amount of satire and visuals to keep me engaged."
– Amogh Inamdar, Student, IIT Bombay

"I find the comics, "haye-tech" entertaining, relatable and very relevant to our society and everyday life. The way it captures the bewilderment of the older generation when introduced to modern gadgets and the internet is on point. The comics also addresses the fact that millenial born kids are often so enthralled and egrossed in their gadgets that they spend most of their waking hours inside of virtual worlds. They often lack physical activity and are becoming very dependent on technology for even the easiest of tasks.

All of these technological problems exaggerate the already existing generation gap even further. The comics illustrates some of these situations in a very comical and exaggerated way. At the surface the jokes are funny and amusing but at the same time they are so relatable to our everyday life that it encourages reflection on the role of technology and how its shaping our way of functioning."
– Prasoon Dhapola, Student, IIT Hyderabad

Conclusion

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My major take away from this project was learning how to write short and crisp narratives. I have always lagged in writing good content, and this was my first attempt in writing short tales. Looking through the testimonies that I have received, it has worked to a good extent.

Also, while getting stories from my friends and family, I realised that my mother isn't the only one whose life has been influenced by digital media and gadgets, I found there are many people who were just as influenced too. So, we should look after such people, where new technology, social media platforms become unfamiliar.

On illustrating short panels, it was eye-opening, and I am looking forward to put these up on social media and get feedback from the viewers.

References

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