IKS AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CYBER AWARENESS: REIMAGINING FOLK AND GURUKUL PEDAGOGIES FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Tejas Anjankar
Research Scholar,
Department of Mass Communication,
RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur.

Dr. Moiz Mannan Haque
Guide,
Assistant Professor Department of Mass Communication,
RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur.

Abstract :

This study explores how principles from the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), particularly panchayat-style dialogue and folk storytelling, can be used to nurture digital responsibility in rural communities. Instead of relying on the usual technical, skill-based approach to cyber awareness, the two-hour session invited participants to reflect on culture and ethics. It began with a short folktale, adapted to mirror challenges of online behavior, and was followed by a community discussion on truthfulness, empathy, and ahimsa (non-violence) in digital spaces. Showing how IKS-based methods can bring a more human, values-driven dimension to digital literacy.

Keywords : Indian Knowledge System (IKS), cyber awareness, digital responsibility, panchayat dialogue, folk storytelling, *ahimsa*, experiential learning, indigenous pedagogy, digital ethics, community engagement

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Introduction :

The rapid spread of digital technology in India has reshaped how people communicate, learn, and connect with one another. But this progress has also brought a rise in cyberbullying, misinformation, and careless online behavior, issues that are particularly visible in rural and semi-urban areas where digital literacy tends to emphasize technical know-how over ethical understanding. Many existing awareness campaigns take a top-down, lecture-style approach, often failing to resonate with local communities or their lived experiences.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), by contrast, offers a more grounded and participatory path. Rooted in community dialogue, storytelling, and shared reflection, it encourages learning that is both moral and practical. Reviving traditions like *panchayat* discussions and folk narratives creates a familiar and culturally meaningful framework to cultivate empathy, responsibility, and integrity, qualities essential for ethical participation in today's digital world.

Research Question :

1. How can traditional Indian Knowledge System (IKS) practices, such as *panchayat* dialogue and folk storytelling, be reimagined to encourage digital responsibility and ethical online behavior within rural communities?

Literature Review :

Cyber Awareness and Digital Literacy in India :

India's digital landscape has grown at an unprecedented pace since the launch of the Digital India initiative, designed to transform the nation into a digitally empowered knowledge economy (Kumar & Bansal, 2025). This rapid expansion has brought new opportunities for communication, education, and governance, but also new vulnerabilities. In rural and semi-urban regions, where digital adoption is rising sharply, users are increasingly exposed to cyber risks such as phishing, identity theft, and online fraud. These challenges underline the pressing need for holistic cyber awareness and digital literacy, both of which form the backbone of a safe and inclusive digital society (Sharma et al., 2024).

Government initiatives like the Information Security Education and Awareness (ISEA) program and Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA) were developed to provide citizens with foundational digital skills and cybersecurity awareness (Kumar & Bansal, 2025). However, multiple studies have shown that their impact is uneven. Persistent barriers, including infrastructural gaps, linguistic diversity, regional inequalities, and the absence of context-sensitive educational materials, continue to limit the reach and effectiveness of these programs (Ghosh & Banerjee, 2022; Pillai & Joshi, 2022).

Participatory and Community-Based Learning Models :

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and participatory learning models have emerged as powerful approaches for fostering culturally relevant education (Das & Rajan, 2022; Sharma et al., 2024). By engaging community members as active participants rather than passive recipients, these frameworks encourage shared learning, trust-building, and collective ownership of outcomes. CBPR's principles, reflection, collaboration, and accessible communication, have been widely applied in education, health, and rural development, yielding sustainable results (Pillai & Joshi, 2022). Yet, their potential remains largely untapped in the realm of digital ethics education, especially in India's diverse rural settings.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Pedagogy :

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a deeply rooted pedagogical approach centered on storytelling, dialogue, and value-based reflection (Ghosh & Banerjee, 2022). Traditions such as the *guru–shishya* model and the oral transmission of epics like the

Mahabharata and *Ramayana* embody experiential learning (*anubhava*) that ties knowledge to ethics, empathy, and social awareness. Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes integrating IKS into modern education, there is still limited empirical research exploring how these traditions can inform digital literacy or online behavior (Das & Rajan, 2022).

The Gap :

A distinct research gap lies at the intersection of IKS pedagogy and digital ethics education. Few studies have examined how traditional, participatory learning systems can foster digital responsibility in a culturally meaningful way. Addressing this gap requires designing interventions that combine the ethical depth of IKS with the practical needs of modern cyber awareness, creating models that resonate with local communities and encourage reflective digital participation (Kumar & Bansal, 2025).

Methodology :

Research Design :

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore how Indian Knowledge System (IKS) pedagogies can be applied to promote digital responsibility within rural settings.

The research centered on the design of a structured model titled the IKS-Based Cyber Awareness Model (ICAM), developed to translate traditional learning practices into meaningful digital ethics education.

Purpose of IKS-Based Cyber Awareness Model (ICAM) :

- Translate ancient Indian pedagogical traditions into practical, community-oriented digital literacy tools.
- Integrate cultural ethics and moral reflection into cyber awareness programs.

Core Components of IKS-Based Cyber Awareness Model (ICAM) :

Panchayat Dialogue Model :

Component	Description
Objective	To encourage ethical reasoning and collective reflection on digital challenges such as misinformation, online trolling, and identity impersonation.
Approach	Circle-based community discussions facilitated by elders, teachers, or respected local figures, creating a space for inclusive, respectful, and reasoned dialogue.

Core Activities	-Group discussions in *sabha* format. -Sharing personal or observed online experiences. -Collective reasoning exercises to identify ethical responses. - Agreement on community-level norms for digital conduct.
IKS Parallel	*Nyaya* (logic and reasoning) and *Sabha/Samvada* (dialogical traditions emphasizing deliberation and consensus).
Learning Outcomes	-Strengthens critical thinking and moral reflection. -Encourages empathy and ethical awareness. -Builds community responsibility in digital communication.

Folk Storytelling Model :

Component	**Description**
Objective	To cultivate empathy, truthfulness, and responsible digital behavior through culturally familiar narratives.
Approach	Local artists, students, or volunteers perform or narrate moral tales adapted to digital contexts. Stories like *Tenali Rama* or *Hitopadesha* are reframed to highlight modern online ethics.
Core Activities	-Short performances or readings of adapted folk tales. -Group reflection on the moral lessons and their relevance to online conduct. -Creative expression through dramatization or retelling.
IKS Parallel	*Itihasa–Purana* tradition of learning through allegory, where storytelling serves as a moral and emotional teaching tool.
Learning Outcomes	-Builds emotional connection to ethical principles. -Simplifies abstract digital ethics through relatable stories. -Reinforces the importance of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-harm) in online spaces.

Gurukul Mentorship Model :

Component	**Description**
Objective	To establish sustained, peer-led guidance for responsible digital practices and ethical communication.
Approach	A small cohort of 5–10 youth, teachers, or volunteers are trained as “digital mentors” who model and reinforce responsible behavior through continuous interaction.

Core Activities	-Training workshops for mentors on privacy, empathy, and cyber safety. -Regular peer sessions or school visits to share lessons. -One-on-one guidance and informal counseling.
IKS Parallel	*Guru–Shishya parampara*, the teacher–disciple mentorship system emphasizing discipline, self-reflection, and moral modeling.
Learning Outcomes	-Encourages continuity of digital ethics education. -Builds local leadership and accountability. -Strengthens community capacity for sustained awareness and guidance.

Conclusion :

The IKS-Based Cyber Awareness Model (ICAM) illustrates how traditional Indian values such as satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), and samyak vak (right speech) can be woven into community learning to make digital spaces more humane and reflective.

This approach aligns closely with the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), which envisions education that is both value-driven and culturally grounded. By drawing from indigenous wisdom, ICAM demonstrates that ethical digital citizenship is not merely a matter of rules or compliance, but a lived practice shaped by community, culture, and conscience.

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