

# Digital India: The Role of Social Media in Promoting Indigenous Knowledge of Traditional Healing Practices

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## Abstract

India's cultural tapestry is intricately woven with threads of traditional healing practices. These methods, passed down through generations, form an integral part of the country's heritage. From the Himalayas to the southern-most tip, indigenous knowledge systems have flourished across diverse regions and communities. Ayurveda is a holistic system that harmonizes mind, body, and spirit. Rooted in ancient texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, Ayurveda emphasizes personalized well-being. The Unani system recognizes the interconnectedness of body and mind, emphasizing preventive measures alongside curative interventions. Siddha medicine revolves around the concept of "Pancha Bhoota" (five elements): earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Yoga is a profound spiritual practice, which unites breath, movement, and meditation, aiming for self-realization. India's youth, armed with smartphones and social media, are rekindling interest in these ancient practices. YouTube channels, Instagram influencers, and Facebook groups disseminate knowledge about Ayurveda, Yoga, and more. The digital era bridges geographical gaps, fostering cross-cultural understanding. As curiosity blooms, India's healing heritage finds new relevance—a testament to collective action and the power of shared wisdom.

**Keywords:** *Yoga, healing practices, preservation, culture, social media, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, ayurveda, siddha, unani, indigenous knowledge, health, wellness*

## Introduction

India, a land of cultural heritage, boasts a wealth of indigenous knowledge systems. These age-old traditions have been lovingly handed down through generations by diverse indigenous groups. What exactly does this indigenous knowledge entail? It encompasses a rich tapestry of skills, practices, and beliefs that have evolved over time. These communities have cultivated their wisdom by harmonizing with their environment—embracing the natural, social, and spiritual dimensions. Within this vast repository, you'll find traditional systems of medicine, agricultural wisdom, forestry practices, handicraft techniques, and a myriad of other cultural treasures. For example, Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of medicine that is still widely practiced and is based on indigenous knowledge <sup>(1)</sup>. Similarly, indigenous agricultural practices such as seed conservation, crop rotation and organic farming have been studied and developed by Indian farmers over centuries.

Indigenous knowledge is intricately tied to the country's cultural identity, and numerous indigenous communities in India still rely on these systems for their livelihoods and daily sustenance. However, the rapid pace of modernization and globalization poses a threat to the survival and transmission of indigenous knowledge. Younger generations are increasingly disconnected from their traditional ways of life. To address this, efforts are underway to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge in India. Initiatives include documentation, research, and community-based education programs. Additionally, in the digital era, India is rediscovering its roots through ancient wisdom. Practices like Yoga and Ayurveda have gained relevance among youth, with many sharing knowledge about ancient healing practices on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. These endeavors recognize the value of indigenous knowledge in fostering sustainable development, cultural diversity, and social cohesion.

## The advent of social media in the digital era

Social media has revolutionized communication, reshaping how people interact. Rheingold (1991) characterizes new media as the latest stage in the evolution of human communication tools. With the rise of smartphones and social media platforms, information flow has surged. Whether it's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, or Snapchat, these platforms offer uninterrupted year-round service. However, this global accessibility has also led to the shrinking of cultures and

communities. Despite this, the internet and social media have significantly benefited the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge. By effectively leveraging social media, we gain deeper insights into ancient health and wellness practices. The wealth of easily accessible information online bridges knowledge gaps and contributes to overall progress.

India has the highest number of Facebook users in any country in the world, with more than 400 million users (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/>). Social media is an effective tool in showcasing one's culture, and propelling the acceptance of cultural diversity in society<sup>(2)</sup>. Blogging and vlogging have also become effective tools, especially for youngsters<sup>(3)</sup> to share their views and knowledge with the rest of the world. YouTube is now teeming with private channels run by locals, offering glimpses of remote and unexplored areas, their inhabitants, and local cuisine. Additionally, numerous channels share valuable tips on yoga and the health benefits of Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha medicines. Digital platforms like YouTube contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and cultural exchange.

### **Belief system, spirituality and traditional healing practices**

India boasts of a range of literature sources, including books, journals, and reports, to provide an overview of the principles and practices of Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, and Yoga. Ayurveda, for instance, is based on the concept of doshas, or body humors, and aims to balance them through diet, herbal remedies, and lifestyle modifications. Unani, on the other hand, is a holistic system of medicine that combines elements of Greek, Roman, and Islamic medicine and emphasizes the use of natural remedies. Siddha, a system of medicine from Tamil Nadu, focuses on the balance of three humors or principles, known as vata, pitta, and kapha, and utilizes herbs, minerals, and animal products in its remedies<sup>(4)</sup>. Yoga, a holistic system of physical, mental, and spiritual practices, encompasses various asanas, pranayama (breathing exercises), and meditation techniques<sup>(5)</sup>. These practices are believed to enhance health and overall well-being. Unfortunately, a significant portion of this valuable knowledge was either undocumented or lost during multiple foreign invasions of India. Despite this, a resilient belief system persists, benefiting citizens. Across generations, elders have passed down knowledge of ancient healing practices, firmly believing in their efficacy. Word-of-mouth transmission and awareness of India's rich heritage have kept these traditions alive. Now, with the rise of digitalization and social media, India's spiritual inclination is experiencing renewed vigor and energy.

### **Promoting indigenous knowledge on a global level**

The Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy) in India is responsible for promoting traditional Indian medicine, including yoga and meditation. The ministry has launched several initiatives to promote the indigenous knowledge of yoga and meditation, such as the National Ayush Mission, which aims to provide healthcare services through yoga and other traditional Indian therapies. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a strong advocate of the benefits of yoga and ayurveda, both for physical and mental health. In his earlier speeches, he has mentioned “Yoga is an invaluable gift of India’s ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. It is not about exercise but to discover a sense of oneness with yourself, the world, and nature. Changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, can help in well-being.”<sup>(6)</sup> In 2014, he proposed the idea of celebrating International Yoga Day on June 21, which was later adopted by the United Nations General Assembly<sup>(7)</sup>.

### **Objective Of The Study**

This research is being done to understand the importance of indigenous knowledge and how digital India is benefitting from it. The study emphasizes the need for the preservation and promotion of traditional healing practices as a means of promoting cultural diversity and sustainable development. Furthermore, it emphasizes on the ancient Indian practices of yoga and meditation and its relevance in the digital era to promote these ancient practices globally.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research design**

Descriptive research design

#### **Method of study**

Random sample survey

The survey method was adopted considering the diverse nature of the respondents, who have a media background. Fifty-five influencers and YouTubers were interviewed who run fitness channels inspired by India’s indigenous knowledge.

## Research Tools

Structure questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed for the research. The questions were framed keeping in mind the nature of the survey. The questionnaire consists of two sections-

### a) Occupational details

The following variable was used to gather background information of the respondents:

1. Name of channel / handle
2. Designation

### b) Points of view

The respondents were asked to give their opinions on various questions asked to them.

## Sampling

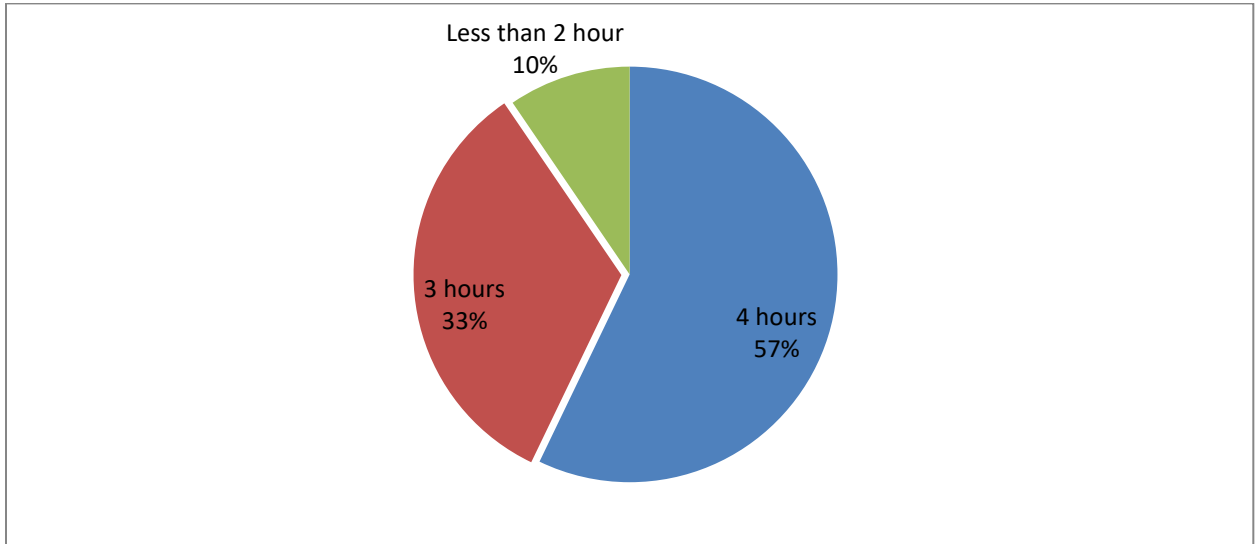
Simple random sampling

- Respondents- **20 Instagram influencers, 18 YouTube channel owners, and 17 Facebook vloggers**
- **Number- 55**

## Data Analysis

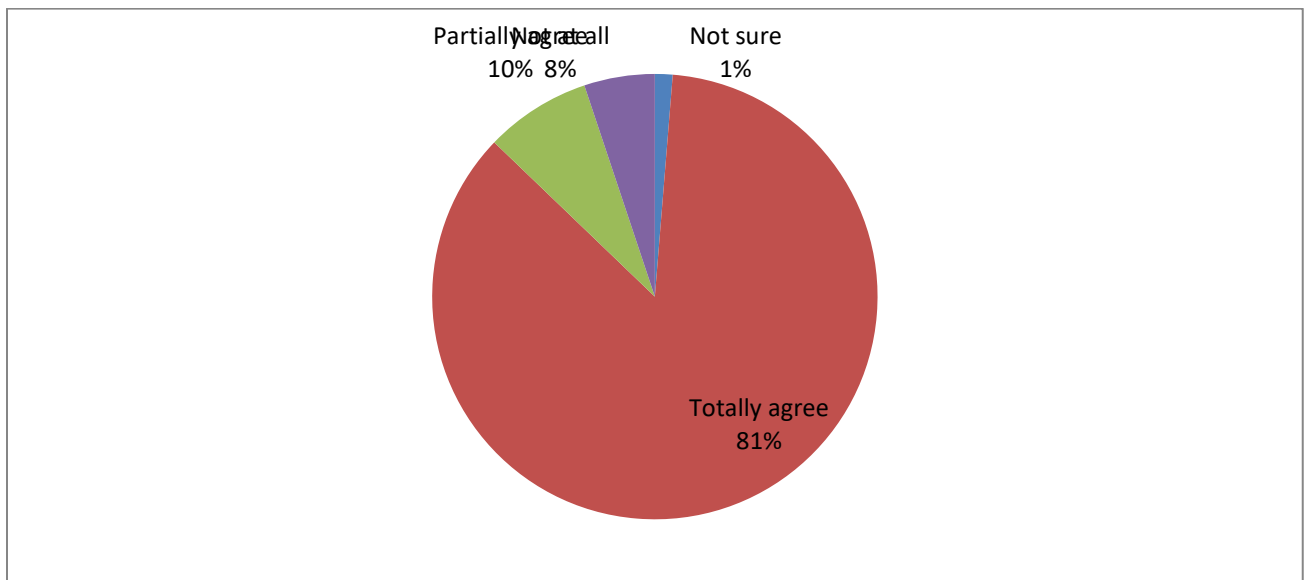
### 1. How many number of hours on an average do you spend on social media?

On being asked the question, maximum number of respondents said that they spent a minimum of 4 hours on social media. They agreed that it was a considerable amount of time, but given the profession and the vast information available on social media, it helped them keep a tab on a lot of information. Influencers have taken to social media for work and for earning livelihood, while also spreading awareness about India's indigenous knowledge.



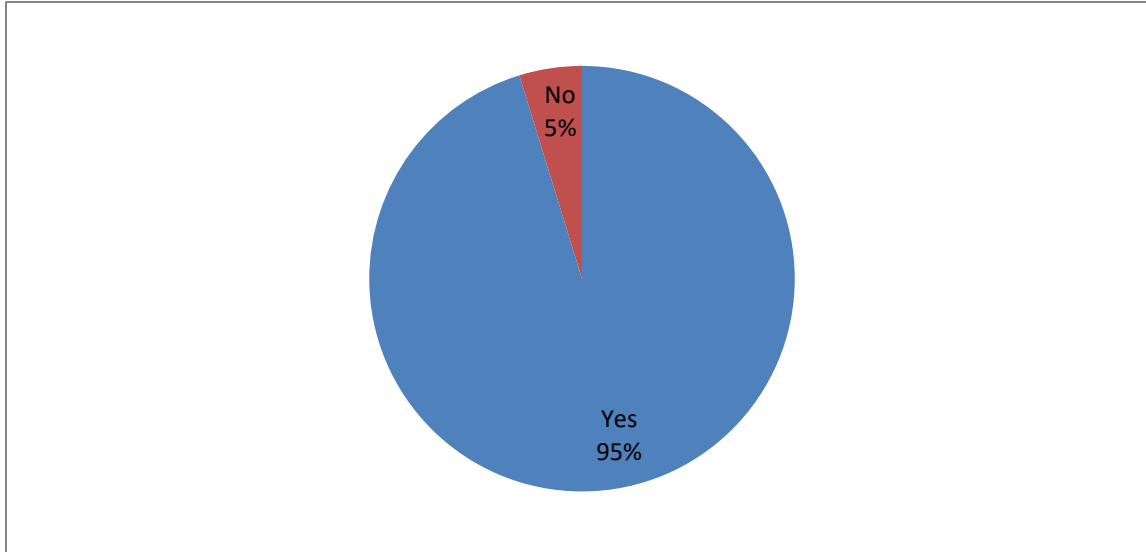
**2. Do you think indigenous knowledge has received a fresh breath of air in the digital era, giving the present generation an insight into the ancient traditions and practices of India?**

The variables for this question were (a) Totally agree, (b) Partially agree, (c) Not at all, (d) Not sure. Maximum correspondents completely agreed that social media was a window to the nation's diversity. India has always been a culturally diverse nation, and social media has become a platform that showcases this diversity to the world. The ancient traditions are now being talked about across the world, thanks to a number of dedicated channels and handles on social media.



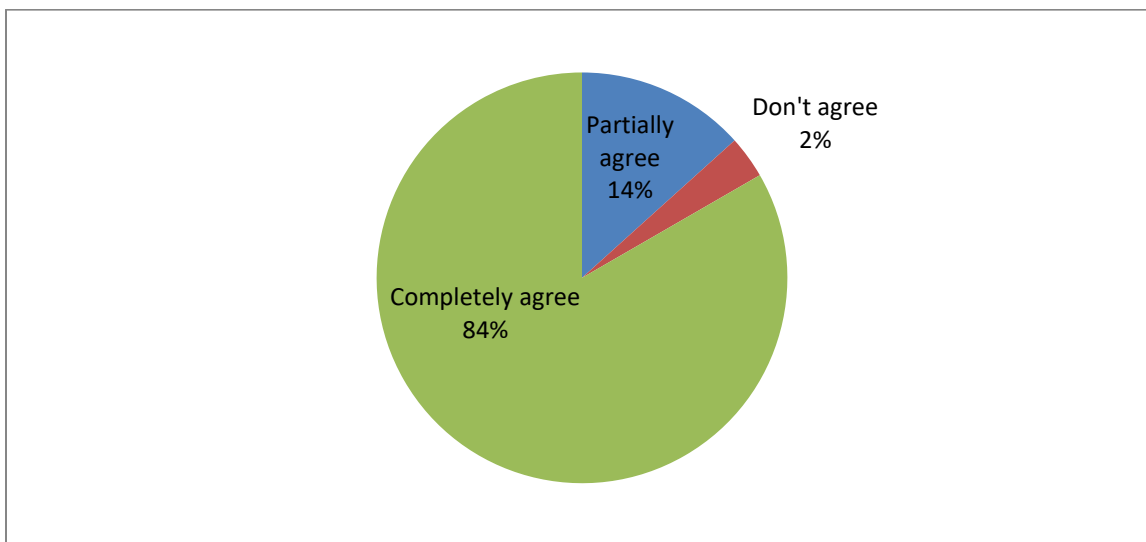
**3. Do you think indigenous knowledge about health & wellness has become a unique selling point for digital India?**

Maximum number of respondents felt that indigenous knowledge is what makes India unique. It plays an important role in establishing India's identity as a world leader when it comes to traditional health practices.



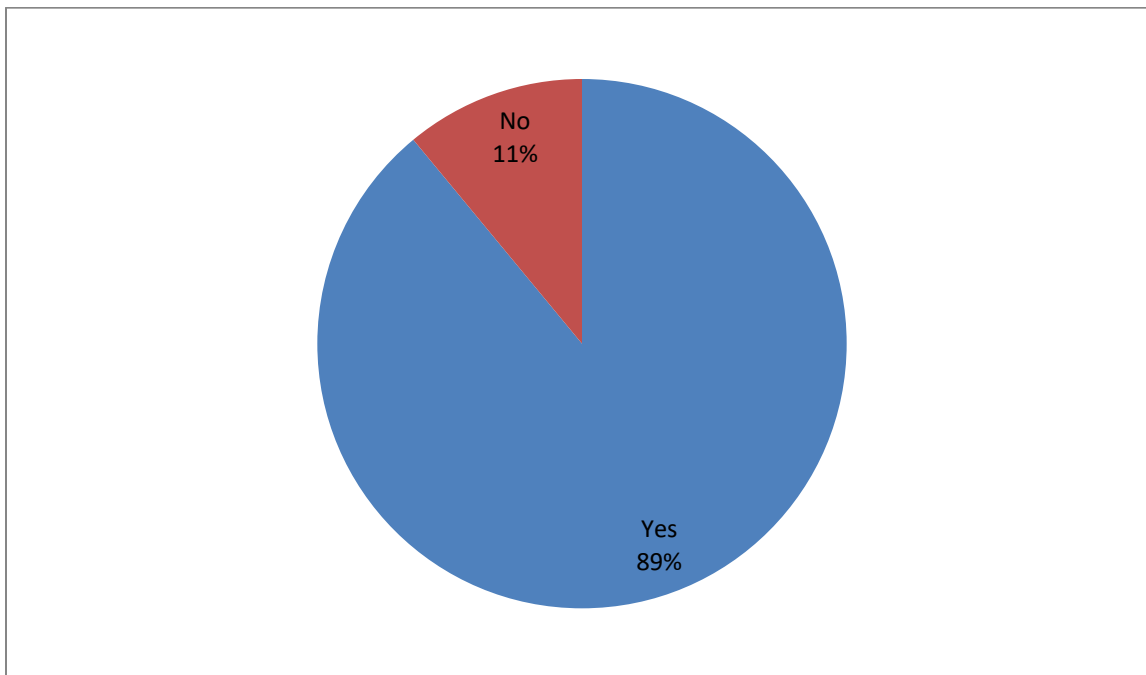
#### 4. Is social media an effective tool in dissemination of information?

Most of the respondents completely agreed that social media helps disseminate valuable information. As a tool and a platform, social media plays a huge role in promoting communication and cultural diversity. Those who partially agreed added that there is always room for improvement as a lot of false information is also floated through social media. So one has to be careful. But the new digital world is helping bridging gaps between long forgotten knowledge and traditions.



**5. Has the talk of India’s indigenous knowledge of health practices increased in the current times, especially propelled by digital platforms and social media?**

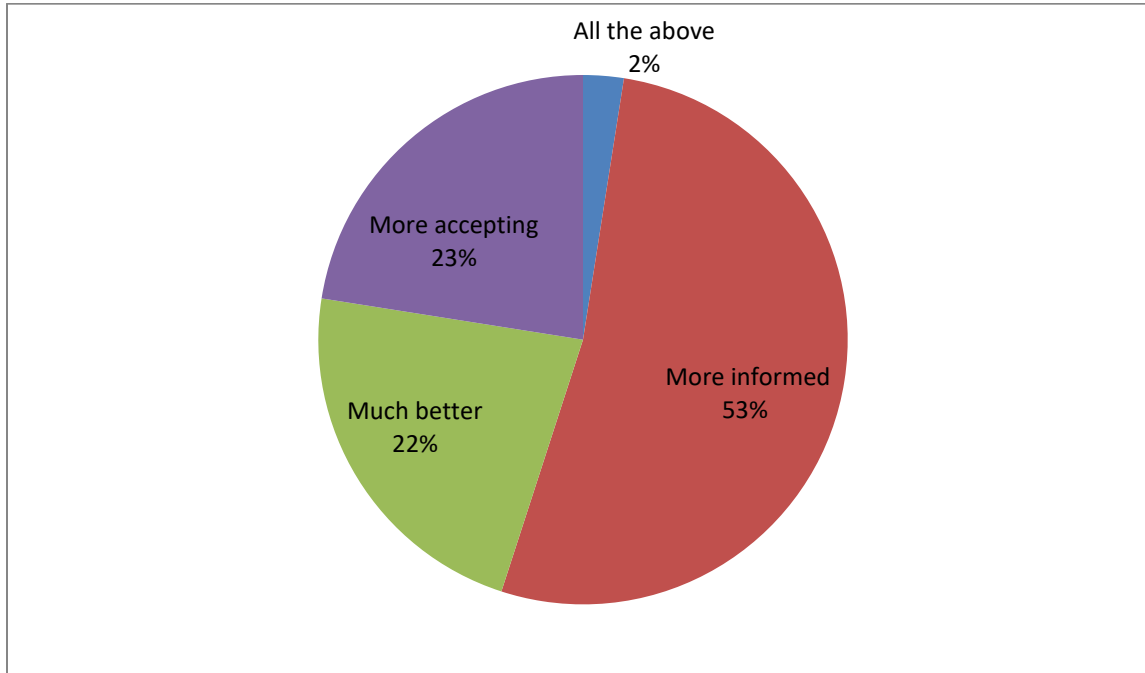
More than 80 per cent respondents said that because of social media, they have been able to stay in touch with people from other ethnic backgrounds. The participants mentioned that social media can help communicate with others and help share their traditional practices with others. It is also an economical way to reconnect with one’s roots, especially for those living outside the country.



**6. Has the nation become better and more informed in terms of indigenous knowledge?**

The response to this question has several connotations, and most respondents felt that the digital era is helped in reconnecting with the roots. It has made the population in general more informed, accepting and sensitive towards traditional health and wellness practices. While a majority of the respondents said they felt more informed about India’s indigenous knowledge, many believed that their knowledge base in fact improved in the digital era. Some also felt that all these factors made it possible for them to be aware about ancient practices. “Social media helped me gain a better

perspective and more aware of the people in general, age-old practices, beliefs and customs,” a respondent said.



### Conclusion

The study’s findings underscore the enduring value of India’s indigenous knowledge related to health and wellness. Whether it’s yoga, Ayurveda, Siddha, or any other ancient healing technique, this knowledge is now widely disseminated in the digital era. Dedicated social media channels and handles have played a pivotal role in restoring the former glory of these ancient practices. Their impact on the current fitness-conscious generation, unafraid to explore Eastern traditions, has been nothing short of revolutionary. The study also highlights social media’s effectiveness as an information-sharing tool, with an overall positive influence. In this digital age, blogs and channels have gained popularity not only in India but globally. People increasingly turn to ancient wisdom for solutions. Ayurveda, meditation, and yoga—among other practices—have successfully treated ailments for centuries. As Western medicine faces limitations, India’s rich indigenous knowledge becomes a beacon of hope. The advent of digital platforms, including social media and websites, has propelled this phenomenon forward. Social media platforms allow rapid sharing of

information, news, and updates. Whether it's health tips, cultural insights, or scientific discoveries, social media acts as a powerful channel for spreading knowledge. Social media transcends geographical boundaries. It connects people worldwide, enabling cross-cultural interactions. For instance, India's indigenous knowledge can now reach a global audience through platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. It has revived interest in ancient practices. Yoga, Ayurveda, and other traditional healing methods gain visibility through influencers, practitioners, and dedicated pages<sup>(8)</sup>. This revival helps preserve cultural heritage. Fitness enthusiasts, wellness seekers, and those interested in holistic health turn to social media for inspiration. Influencers share workout routines, meditation techniques, and dietary advice, impacting lifestyle choices. Social media fosters communities around shared interests. People passionate about Indian culture, spirituality, or health practices find like-minded individuals, creating supportive networks.

In addition to facilitating communication, digital platforms play a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural understanding and adaptation<sup>(9)</sup>. Respondents mentioned spending significant time on social media to learn new things. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube host countless videos, reels, and shorts discussing the health benefits of ancient practices. This exchange of knowledge has bridged cultural gaps. India's healthcare systems—such as Ayurveda, yoga, Siddha, and other traditional remedies—remain custodians of the country's rich heritage and wisdom. Ashrams and traditional healing centers thrive, attracting foreigners seeking the benefits of indigenous health practices. Even eating habits are influenced; the West now acknowledges the health benefits of turmeric, a spice Indians have used for centuries<sup>(10)</sup>. Nutritional value and the benefits of fruits and vegetables are widely discussed. YouTube vloggers and social media influencers have significantly contributed to creating a digital footprint for India's indigenous knowledge. In essence, the world looks to India for deep-rooted insights into health and wellness. Digital India continues to propel this knowledge onto the global stage.

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