

Tradition to Technology: Panchang- Based Calendar Communication of the Cultural Heritage, Kumbh Mela

Mohit Kumar Jaiswal
Research Scholar,
Journalism and Mass Communication
Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, UP

Dr. Sadhana Srivastava
Assistant Professor,
Journalism and Mass Communication
Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, UP

Abstract

In India, the Calendar (Panchang) is a comprehensive, ancient, and scientific system of timekeeping based on the movements of the sun, moon, and stars. This research paper studies the Kumbh Mela held in India and its journey from ancient times to the modern era. In Indian culture, a "mela" is a gathering of people that serves as a medium for the propagation of spiritual, social, cultural, political, and commercial institutions and organizations, fulfilling religious, cultural, customary, and traditional needs, as well as providing opportunities for trade, sacrifice, entertainment, and countless other aspirations and requirements. In the Indian psyche, fairs evoke a unique enthusiasm, often manifested as large crowds during cultural, religious, and social celebrations. People of all ages and religions participate. The timing is determined, in part, by Panchangs, which are readily available for 2-20 rupees. The Kumbh Mela, often considered among the largest fairs, holds the distinction of being the largest fair in the world.

This paper refers to the journey of calendar-based communication from tradition to technological transformation in the perspective of the Kumbh Mela. It explores how astronomical principles, religious legitimacy, and modern mass media combine to expand the dates, times, and liveliness of the Kumbh Mela, the Magh Mela, and other fairs. It also analyzes the challenges and potential of digital communication systems, particularly in terms of the authenticity and credibility of the event, and in bridging the gap between traditional astrologers and government authorities. This paper identifies the interplay between Kumbh Mela tradition and technology, where ancient calendar principles remain in place, yet communication processes are modernizing and evolving in the digital age.

Keywords- Communication, calendar, Panchang, Kumbh, Fair, Technology, Heritage, Media, almanacs, Panchang,

Traditional Communication Medium: The Concept of a Calendar (Panchang)

The word "Panchang" is made up of five components: first, the date (tithi), the day based on the moon; second, the day of the week (vaar), the third (nakshatra), the constellation in which the moon is located; fourth, the yoga (yoga) formed by the conjunction of the Sun and Moon; and fifth, the karana (half of the date).¹ The combination of these five elements is called the Panchang. It is currently used to determine the day, date, month, auspicious time, festivals, fasts, planetary positions, auspicious time for travel, marriage, etc.² It is a cultural communication system through which auspicious dates are announced and religious festivals are scheduled, keeping human society connected to a common time cycle.

The Kumbh Mela is determined by planetary positions based on astronomical calculations based on the almanac, which includes the zodiac sign of Jupiter, the zodiac sign of the Sun, and the constellation of the Moon. These positions determine whether a particular location will host the Maha Kumbh (12 years), the Ardhha Kumbh (6 years), and the Magh Mela (every year). In ancient times, information about the almanac was transmitted orally through astrologers, priests of the Akharas, and the guru-disciple tradition. With the passage of time, the almanac and social organization evolved, and the timing of the Kumbh Mela, bathing festivals, royal processions of the Akharas, rituals, and sadhu initiations, etc., were also displayed in the calendar, which functions as a mass communication system.³ Modern Kumbh Melas attract millions of devotees. Therefore, digital communication evolved into digital almanacs and mobile apps like Kumbh Sahayak, along with astrology apps, government almanac portals, real-time notifications, and mobile-based auspicious time updates. However, underlying all of these is the same old almanac system that has been in place since ancient times. To address current shortcomings, technological standardization has expanded, with processes such as the Central Almanac Committee, standardized digital almanacs, and approvals by Akharas being adopted. The almanac, represented by the calendar, reaches people's homes before beginning of the new year.

Kumbh Mela: An Introduction

Three stories are prevalent regarding the Kumbh Mela celebrations. The first is the story of Maharishi Durvasa, the second the story of Kadru and Vinata, and the third the story of the churning of the ocean.

1- The first story among the ancient tales concerns Indra, the king of the gods. Once, Indra, intoxicated, was wandering alone with an Apsara (celestial nymph) named Rambha. At that moment, he saw Sage Durvasa, who was traveling from Vaikuntha (Vishnu's abode) to Mount Kailash. Indra respectfully bowed to him. Sage Durvasa blessed him and also gave him a precious divine garland of Parijata flowers, which he had received from Lord Vishnu. Instead of wearing the rare garland himself, Indra placed it on the head of his beloved elephant, Airavata. However, Airavata threw the garland to the ground and trampled it with his feet. Angered by the disregard for the divine garland given as a blessing, Durvasa cursed all the gods, including Indra, to become destitute. The resulting drought and famine caused by the curse caused widespread panic. To address this dire situation, all the gods went to Lord Narayana. Upon Narayana's suggestion, the gods and demons churned the ocean. After the

churning, Goddess Lakshmi appeared, and rain began to fall. This naturally alleviated the crisis facing the entire world dependent on the sage.

During the churning of the ocean, thirteen other gems emerged, the most prominent of which was the Amrit-Kumbh. When the gods, with the help of Lord Vishnu, sought to monopolize the nectar, the demons, enraged, hid the Amrit-Kumbh in the Nagaloka. Garuda, the bird-king of Lord Vishnu, assisted them in this. The places where Garuda placed the Amrit-Kumbh on his way from Nagaloka to Kshir sagar have become known as Kumbh-sthals today. While transporting the Amrit-Kumbh from Nagaloka to Kshir sagar, the demons stopped at twelve locations for rest. Naturally, the Amrit-Kumbh was placed in twelve locations, eight of which are in the Devloka (heavenly realm) and four in the Mortal Loka (the mortal realm). Over time, the tradition of Kumbh-snan became prevalent in four locations in the mortal realm: Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayag.

2. According to the story told in the Adi Parva of the Mahabharata, Sage Kashyapa had two wives, named Vinata and Kadru. Kadru was the daughter of Daksha Prajapati. Vinata gave birth to Garuda, also known as Vainateya, while Kadru became the mother of Vasuki and a thousand powerful snakes. Kashyapa's second wife was extremely jealous. Once, they began arguing about the color of the tail of Uchchaihshravas, the white horse of the sun god. Vinata said it was white, while Kadru claimed it was black. They made a wager that the loser would become the winner's slave. Kadru knew that Uchchaihshravas's tail was black. Therefore, she ordered her sons—the thousand snakes—to transform themselves into black hairs and cling to Uchchaihshravas's tail. Most of her sons obeyed her, except for a few. Then, the swift-footed Kadru, along with her co-wife Vinata, crossed the ocean and quickly reached Uchchaihshravas. Vinata was stunned to see the tail of the white, swift horse turn black. Kadru defeated her by deceit. As per the condition, Vinata had to become Kadru's slave, the Amrit-Kumbh. Kadru stipulated that she would free Vinata from servitude only when someone brought her the Amrit-Kumbh, protected by Vasuki, from the Naga realm. For her own liberation, Vinata entrusted this responsibility to her son. Defeating all the gods and destroying the instruments protecting the Amrit, Garuda succeeded in bringing the Amrit for his mother. However, Garuda, carrying the Amrit-Kumbh, proceeded across the earth to the ashram of his father, sage Kashyapa, located on Mount Gandhamadana. Meanwhile, Vasuki informed Indra. To stop Garuda, Indra and other gods fought with him at four locations. During the battle, a few drops of the nectar spilled at four places. This gave rise to the concept of the Kumbh festival.

3- Following the Devas and Asuras War, the churning of the ocean took place.

During the churning of the ocean of milk (Kshira Sagara), fourteen divine treasures were obtained, all of which were precious, but the pot of Amrita (nectar of immortality) was priceless. A war broke out between the gods and demons for possession of the Amrita pot. The demons won and seized the pot. Defeated, the gods sent Jayanta, the son of Indra, the king of the gods, to retrieve the Amrita pot. Jayanta transformed himself into a crow and set out to protect the Amrita pot from the demons. Eventually, after misleading the demons, Jayanta managed to escape with the pot of Amrita. Just then, Shukracharya, the guru of the demons, spotted Jayanta in his crow form. As soon as he informed the demons of the

deception, they began chasing Jayanta. However, none of them could catch him. But, in the ensuing struggle, the pot of Amrita fell, and drops of the nectar spilled at four places: Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayag. It took Jayanta twelve days to reach heaven with the Amrita pot from the ocean of milk. According to mythological traditions, one day in heaven is equivalent to one year in the mortal world. Therefore, the tradition of the holy Kumbh Mela, a sacred bathing festival, began at Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayag every twelve years.

This story of churning of the ocean has been given more importance than others. In it, Lord Vishnu, assuming the form of Mohini, defeats the demons through deceit. Here, the story of Garuda is associated with Vishnu, and the serpents in the form of Vasuki are associated with Shiva.⁴

The gods and demons together churned the Kshir sagar to obtain the nectar. When Dhanvantari appeared with the pot of nectar in his hand, Jayanta, on the advice of the gods, snatched the pot and stealthily fled. The demons heard this and pursued Jayanta. The gods also appointed Surya, Chandra, Guru, and Shani to protect the pot. This fight between the gods and demons lasted for 12 days, during this the pot was also in motion. As a result, the nectar contained in it spilled at four places. For this reason, Kumbh Melas are held at these four places.

Based on the evidence, it cannot be said with complete certainty when the Kumbh Mela began.⁵ However, according to evidence, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) visited India during the reign of Harshavardhana (606-647 AD) and mentioned in his travelogue that a charity festival is celebrated every five years at the sacred confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna in Prayag. Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) does not use the word "kumbh" in his description, but he certainly refers to the Ardha Kumbha held every five years in Prayag. However, due to confusion or error, he wrote "every five years" instead of "After five years" in his description. It is also possible that the mistake may have occurred due to differences in Chinese and Indian chronology.⁶

Kumbh Mela, an Intangible Cultural Heritage

In 2017, UNESCO recognized India's Kumbh Mela as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. This signifies the universal acceptance of this grand spiritual festival. 'In addition to Yoga and Nowruz, the Kumbh Mela is the third such achievement in the last two years. This is a matter of great joy and immense pride for India. The Kumbh Mela is considered the world's largest gathering, where millions of people from across the country and the world gather to bathe in the holy rivers and experience the festival. This is India's second achievement in the last two years. Earlier, in 2016, India received recognition for Yoga. This recognition was granted to the Kumbh Mela by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO. The decision to include the Kumbh Mela in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was taken at its 12th session held in Jeju, South Korea, from December 4 to 9, 2017. While recommending the recognition of the Kumbh Mela as intangible cultural heritage, the members of the expert committee recommended that it is the largest peaceful gathering of pilgrims on Earth. This

religious event demonstrates tolerance and inclusivity, and people participate in it enthusiastically without any discrimination. ’

Dr. Vivek Chaturvedi, Additional Mela Officer, Mela Authority, Prayagraj, said in an interview with History TV that the Kumbh Mela is a religious event where no invitations are sent; everyone checks the date from a calendar-based almanac and arrives at the Mela grounds on their own. Thus, the almanac, which costs only a few rupees, serves as their invitation to participate in this event.

Literature review and preliminary discussions:

Bryant, E. (2001). The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture. This book, "The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture," written by Edwin Bryant, focuses on the origins and development of Vedic culture. It discusses the arrival of the Aryans and other related aspects. The book presents facts related to Indian history and provides a detailed study of Vedic customs, cultural aspects, and the Rigveda.

Chopra, D. (2023). Bharat Me Kumbh. This book, published by NBT, provides comprehensive information on the Kumbh Mela, from its ancient history to the medieval and modern periods, as compiled by Dr. Dhananjay Chopra. It also details the Kumbh Melas held in India at Prayag, Haridwar, Nashik, Ujjain, and other locations, discussing the role of the media, the impact of commerce, the influence of politics, the confluence of religion and culture, crowd management, and other related aspects. Furthermore, it includes a detailed description of the Magh Mela held in Prayagraj. I believe that the wealth of information about the Kumbh Mela, combined with the vivid, firsthand account of the festival, makes this book particularly engaging and insightful.

Saraswati, S. (1996). Kumbh Mela : The World’s Largest Pilgrimage. This book presents a vivid and detailed study of this important religious and cultural event, incorporating many significant facts related to it. According to the author, it is a grand ritual of Hinduism, whose antiquity is traced back to the description of the churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan). The book describes the religious rituals and the bathing and ceremonies performed by the various monastic orders on the banks of the sacred rivers. It also details the practice of Kalpavasa (a period of spiritual retreat) on the holy land, and provides descriptions of the sadhus, saints, pilgrims, and other devotees participating in this event, all within the context of Indian culture.

Nirmalendu, K. (2019). Prayagraj Aur Kumbh, Sanskratik Vaibhav ki Abhinav Gatha. The above book, "Prayagraj Aur Kumbh: A Unique Saga of Cultural Splendor," focuses on Prayagraj, considering it as one of the two main centers of Aryan culture in India, Aryavarta, and Madhya Pradesh (the other being Ayodhya). It includes an introduction to Prayagraj, a detailed study of Maharishi Bharadwaj's ashram, the glory of Prayag as described in the Ramcharitmanas, and the Akshaya Vat tree, along with articles on the Kumbh Mela.

McLuhan, M. (1964). Understanding Media. This book by Marshall McLuhan provides a comprehensive description of communication media and is considered a seminal and highly influential work on the subject. It offers an analytical study of print media, television, film, radio, and other electronic media. The book extensively explores how these media influence and transform human senses, thought processes, understanding, and social systems. This book is as valuable for understanding communication in the modern age as any contemporary book on the subject.

Research Objectives:

1. To study the utility of calendars (Panchang) in communication Process.
2. To Find the communication of the Kumbh Mela, Magh Mela, and other fairs through calendars (Panchang) in human life.
3. To analyze the changing forms of information communication at the Kumbh Mela through digital technologies.

Statement of the Problem:

1. The declining popularity of calendars (panchang) and the resulting decrease in current calendar-based communication.
2. Lower reliance on calendars (panchang) in changing times.
3. Shortcomings in current media and social media communication regarding the Kumbh Mela, which is based on the calendar (panchang).

Research Methodology:

1. Sampling Method - Using purposive sampling, 50 people are selected for the research study.
2. Questionnaire Method - The questionnaire method were used to collect data.
3. Observation Method - The observation method is used to collect data.

Theoretical framework:

This research paper employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the cultural heritage and communication of the Kumbh Mela through the lens of traditional, almanac-based calendars and modern technology. It aims to understand how the dates of the Kumbh Mela and other religious events are determined, to demonstrate its popularity, and to shed light on its various aspects. The findings will contribute to understanding the communication of Indian traditional almanac-based calendars.

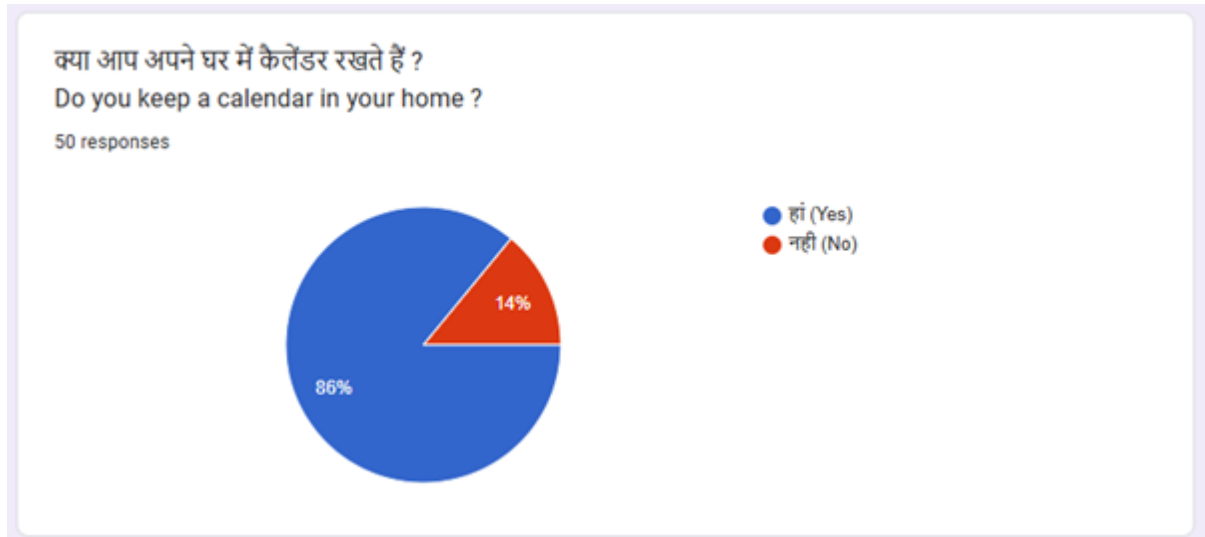
Research Limitation -

1. This research paper included 50 online respondents, whose age range from 15 to 45 years.

2. The above 50 online respondents are participants of the seminar organized on the subject of Kumbh in Prayagraj.

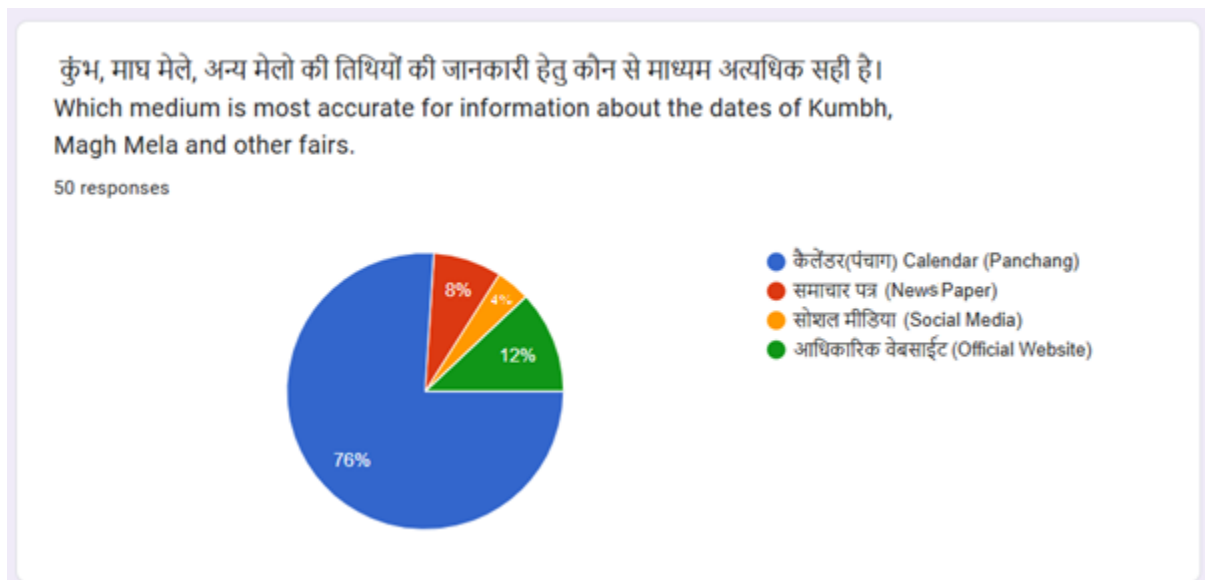
Analytical study of the answers received from the respondents:

1. Do you keep a calendar in your home?



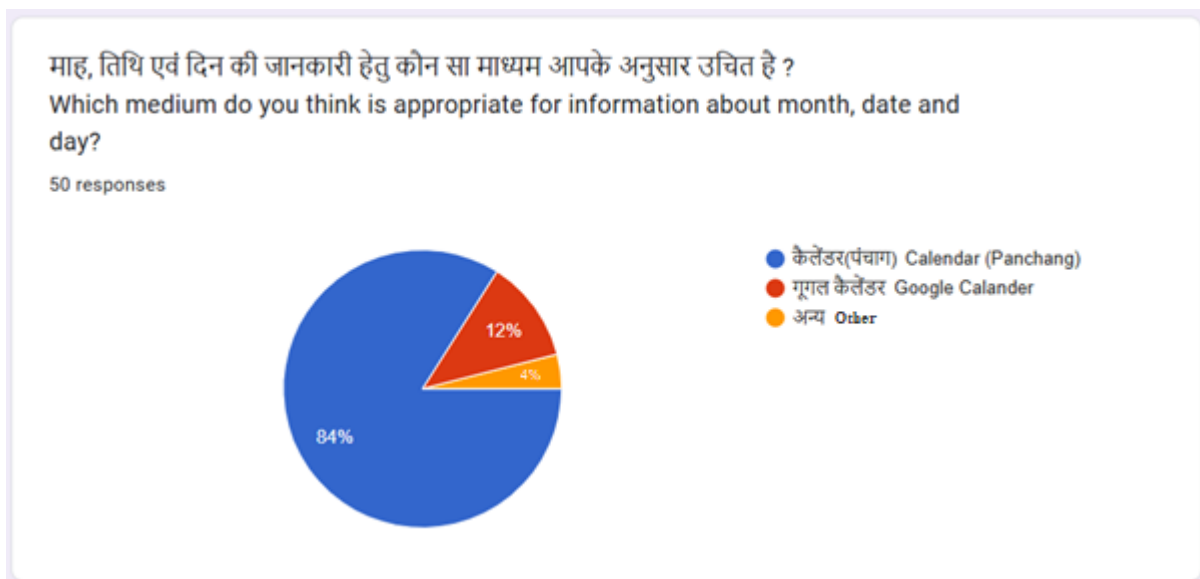
The pie chart above clearly shows that 43 out of 50 respondents, or 86 percent, said they keep a calendar in their homes and agreed with "yes," while 14 percent said "no." This suggests that even today, calendars are widely recognized.

2- Which medium is most accurate for information about the dates of Kumbh, Magh Mela and other fairs?



The pie chart above clearly shows that 38 out of 50 respondents, or 76 percent, said they use calendars, or Panchangs, to find out the dates of the Kumbh Mela, Magh Mela, and other fairs. Eight percent said newspapers, four percent said social media, and 12 percent said official websites. This suggests that calendars, or Panchangs, are currently used to find out the dates of the Kumbh Mela, Magh Mela, and other fairs.

3- According to you, which medium is appropriate for information about month, date and day?



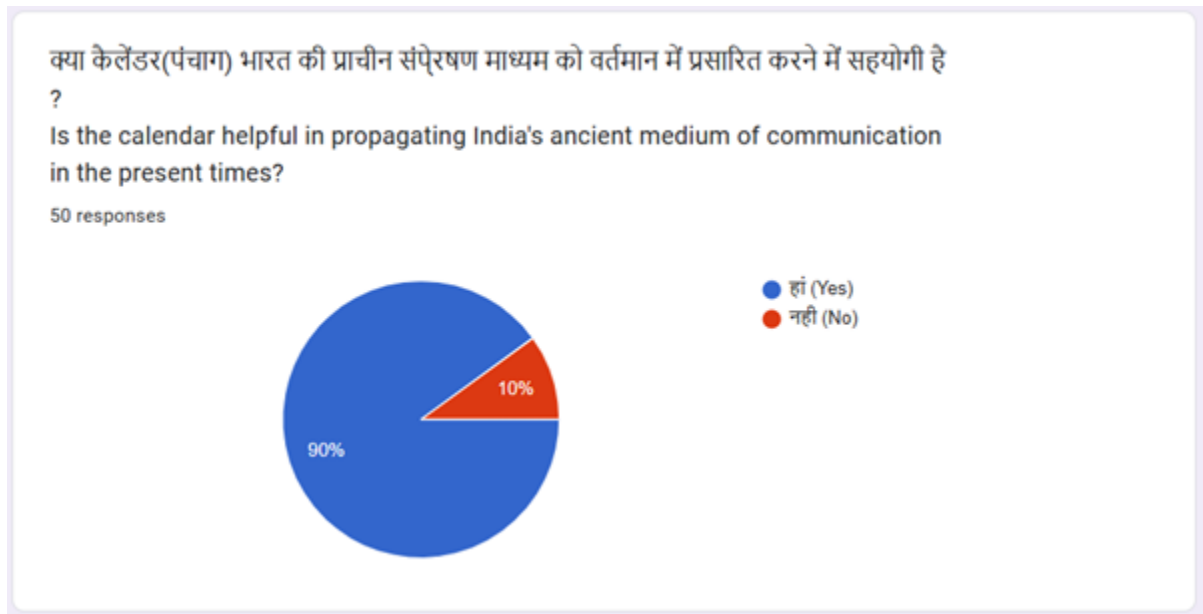
This pie chart clearly shows that 42 out of 50 respondents, or 84 percent, said they use a calendar to determine the month, date, and day. 12 percent indicated Google Calendar, and 4 percent agreed with others. This clearly indicates that calendars are currently used to determine the month, date, and day.

4- Which medium is most suitable for information about festivals in India?



It is clear from the pie chart above that 38 out of 50 respondents, or 86 percent, said they use calendars (Panchang) to gather information about festivals in India. Four percent said newspapers, eight percent said social media, and two percent said official websites. This suggests that calendars (Panchang) are currently used to gather information about festivals in India.

5- Is the calendar (Panchang) helpful in propagating India's ancient medium of communication in the present times?



The pie chart above clearly shows that 45 out of 50 respondents, or 90 percent, agreed that the calendar (Panchang) is helpful in propagating India's ancient medium of communication in the present day, while 10 percent agreed that it is not. This suggests that the calendar (Panchang) is helpful in propagating India's ancient medium of communication in the present day.

Discussion and interpretation:

The Kumbh Mela is one of India's largest religious-cultural events, whose dates are entirely based on Vedic astrology and the almanac. Traditionally, the auspicious bathing, festival dates, and events of the Kumbh Mela were communicated through oral, mythological, and astrological sources. In the 21st century, this communication process has become technology-based. Digital almanacs, mobile apps, government portals, GIS mapping, social media, and AI-based software such as chatbots now disseminate information on a large scale. This paper explores the transition from the traditional almanac system to modern technological communication. In essence, the almanac provides legitimacy to any given date, while technology offers simplicity and widespread accessibility. The almanac and technology together present a hybrid time structure, where ancient astronomy and modern digital communication interact. This makes the Kumbh Mela not just a religious event, but a global environment where tradition and technology coexist.

Latour's theories suggest that 'technology transforms ordinary experience. The existing digital almanacs are displaying comprehensive results through sophisticated algorithms using ancient almanac methods.'⁷

According to McLuhan, ‘new media transforms cultural structures – the Kumbh Mela is embedded in a new media ecosystem where broadcasting incorporates digital, traditional, and oral systems. The tradition of almanac-based communication makes the Kumbh Mela highly authoritative. Technology has not eliminated its role, but rather expanded it.’⁸

Conclusion

The study analyzes the almanac's historical origins, its mathematical structure, religious and cultural significance, and modern utility. The research reveals that the almanac is not merely a tool for religious rituals, but a complete astronomical calendar, founded on highly sophisticated calculations.⁸ The evolution from traditional communication based on the almanac to technology-driven systems represents a major cultural shift and continues to hold sway in the present. The almanac remains central to the Kumbh Mela's sense of time. Meanwhile, technology serves only as a novel medium. In this process, traditional communication and modern communication becoming increasingly important means of preserving cultures in a rapidly transforming world. The Kumbh Mela follows thousands of years old astronomical cycles, while also embracing the latest communication technologies. Instead of traditional communication currently being replaced by modern communication, tradition and technology reinforce and enhance each other.

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