

Community service

The internet isn't all dark web and black mirrors—it's also a truly democratic, sometimes even comforting space that brings people together. AARTI VIRANI scours the web for a sense of community

THE MOMMY NETWORK

KIRAN AMLANI, SHREYA LAMBA, TEJAL BAJLA, CO-FOUNDERS



WHAT: This invitation-only Facebook group unites over 10,000

Mumbai moms.

WHY: Trading candid notes on post-partum woes, paediatricians, and picky eaters, the group proves that even Chief Chaos Managers (Bajla's term for supermoms) need a place for unvarnished real talk. [Facebook.com/groups/mommynetworkindia](https://www.facebook.com/groups/mommynetworkindia)



Approximately 10 years ago, the acclaimed Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie delivered a lightning bolt of a TED talk in Oxford, warning against the perils of a single story. “When we reject the single story, when we realise that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise,” she declared, concluding a captivating set of remarks that dismantled the relationship between narratives, stereotypes and power. In many ways, Adichie’s luminous speech was an unintended rescue plan for the digital age. Today, it serves as a crucial reminder that for all the grave pitfalls of the internet, too often guilty of reinforcing inequalities and amplifying existing conflicts, there exist corners of cyberspace where previously marginalised groups and muzzled causes are finally claiming their own mouth-

pieces. And despite recent indications that the Indian government was on the precipice of launching a hotly contested “New Media Command Room,” intended to monitor individuals’ data and online behaviour, the democratically dicey plan was retracted in August.

In India, where a staggering 71 per cent of internet users are still men, many empowerment campaigns are still on much-needed missions to narrow technology’s gaping gender gap. But the country’s sheer heterogeneity translates into a kaleidoscopic array of digital turfs. From the decidedly practical (including a platform revolutionising mental health issues) to the delightfully idealistic (a brave new blog functions as a collection of crowd-sourced life lessons), here are some of the most noteworthy community catalysts. >

HOPE NETWORK
PRACHI S VAISH, FOUNDER

WHAT: Steered by a Pune-based psychologist, India's first-of-its-kind online psychological portal matches clients with quality mental health therapists.

WHY: In a country that is teetering on the edge of a serious mental health epidemic—an estimated 56 million people in India suffer from depression, according to the World Health Organization—this service is a crucial first step in demystifying the psychotherapy process. *Hopenetwork.in*

AVAAZ
RICKEN PATEL, FOUNDER

WHAT: The world's most powerful online activist network, it has 47 million members across 194 countries.

WHY: The global campaigning community combats fast fashion, climate change and other pressing causes—proving that petitions, campaigns and direct action can drastically alter the course of international decision-making. *Avaaz.org*

SOCIALBLOOD
KARTHIK NARALASETTY, FOUNDER

WHAT: It's a tool to convert Facebook's billion-member-strong population into the world's foremost blood bank.

WHY: Even in developed nations, the number of voluntary blood donors remains startlingly low. Naralasetty's lifesaving organisation strips the stigma from the process, while replacing an archaic and decentralised system with a trustworthy network. *Facebook.com/socialblood*

TELLATINA
CHANDA SURANA, FOUNDER

WHAT: Born out of an enterprising homemaker's endless WhatsApp threads, this international info-sharing app is like a carefully curated bulletin board that hopes to tackle everything from nutrition to styling.

WHY: The app's reference-only admission system ensures that this airtight network remains a trusted circle of friends, comprising those in the know as well as influencers. *Tellatina.com*

SHEROES
SAIREE CHAHAL, FOUNDER

WHAT: India's largest exclusively female growth ecosystem nurtures entrepreneurs with career resources and success stories and helps its over 2.5 million women members (from teens to grandmoms) address it all, from fiscal to physical health queries.

WHY: Nearly 50 per cent of Indian women bow out of the workforce by mid-career, thanks to the competing demands of professional lives and familial responsibilities. Chahal's platform is an attempt for women to define professional leadership on their own customised terms. *Sheroes.com*

COOKPAD INDIA
AKIMITSU SANO, FOUNDER

WHAT: A free online recipe-sharing website, with roots in Japan, the service started in 1998, when a do-gooder software engineer wanted to help local farmers sell produce.

WHY: Determined to take the drudgery out of everyday cooking, the site manages to cover India's staggering gastronomical diversity. *Cookpad.com/in*

GIRLS LOVE TRAVEL
HALEY WOODS, FOUNDER

WHAT: Comprising 6,00,000 female globetrotters (from age 13 to 92), this is a must-consult before any solo adventure.

WHY: With over 100 local chapters scattered across the globe, GLT members serve as empowering resources for navigating travel safety, alongside offering other practical wanderlust-related intel. *Girlslovetravel.org*

PROJECT FUEL
DEEPAK RAMOLA, FOUNDER

WHAT: A movement devoted to philosophical instructions, FUEL stands for Forward the Understanding of Every Life Lesson.

WHY: What began as scribbled notes in a journal is now a blog teeming with 50,000 solicited nuggets, tours as well as transformative youth workshops, which the young teacher, Ramola, recently unveiled in Punjab. *Projectfuel.in*

MYDIDI
JHONNY JHA, SAGAR SEN,
TUSHAR JADHAV, CO-FOUNDERS

WHAT: A Mumbai-based on-demand cleaning service that thoroughly vets its employees before granting them a spot on a 120-person roster of household help professionals.

WHY: An empowerment-driven approach—prospective “didis” are trained, then paid a fixed income, not typical of the conventional domestic worker landscape—and downloadable app, where customers provide ratings and feedback, ensuring this service is as scrupulous as it is convenient. *Mydidi.in*

BLANK NOISE
JASMEEN PATHEJA, FOUNDER

WHAT: A volunteer-driven online art initiative, this launched in 2003 as one impassioned university student's outraged response to gender-based street harassment.

WHY: Through its campaign Action Heroes, participants are encouraged to leverage social media stories to reclaim public spaces and wipe out misogynistic norms. *Blanknoise.org*