Research Paper

Mass Communication

Role of Social Networking Sites in Some Key Cases

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ABSTRACT

Social media embrace the web services that let the users construct their profile and communicate with each other. With the growing popularity of Social Media, some randomly selected cases were studied and analysed in order to ascertain role of Social Networking Sites. The study showed that people have got their own media to raise their voice and stand for their rights. Social Media possess the character of true democratization of information, where the dominant paradigm of communication loses its hold. The participatory nature of Social Networking Sites cuts through caste and class barriers and yet does not disturb the typical idiosyncrasies inherent to various groups within the masses. The top-down approach is replaced by the bottom-up communication and hence, in a way, it is Total Media.

Keywords : Social Networking Sites, Social Media, Journalism, Total Media, Democratization of Information

INTRODUCTION

When the Web became popular in the mid-1990s, it enabled people to share information in ways that was never possible before. But as limitless as the possibilities seemed, there was a personal aspect that was lacking. In the early 2000s, the Web became much more personal as social networking websites were introduced and embraced by the masses. Social Networking sites are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and, view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007)

EVOLUTION

There are many ideas about first occurrence of social media. Social Networks have evolved over the years to the modern-day variety which uses digital media. During the 1960's, the public saw the advent of email (Borders, 2010). However, the Internet was not available to the public until 1991. Social Media was further developed during 1970's. MUD, originally known as Multi-User Dungeon, was real-time virtual world with role-playing games, interactive fiction, and online chat. BBS (bulletin board system) was created in 1978, the same year as MUD. Users log into the system to upload and download software, read news, or exchange messages with each other (Ritholz, 2010).

Many Social Networking sites were created in 1990s. Some examples include Six Degrees, BlackPlanet, Asian Avenue, and MoveOn. These are, or have been, online niche social sites where people can interact, including sites for public policy advocacy and social network based on a web of contacts model (Ritholz, 2010). In 2000, social media received a great boost with the witnessing of many social networking sites springing up. This highly boosted and transformed the interaction of individuals and organisations who share common interest in music, education, movies and friendship based on

social networking. Among those that were launched included LunarStorm, Sixdegrees, Cyword, Ryze and Wikipedia. In 2001, fotolog, sky blog and Friendster were launched, and in 2003, MySpace, LinkedIn, lastFM, tribe.net, Hi5, etc. In 2004, popular names like Facebook, Harvard, Dogster and Mixi evolved. During 2005, big names like Yahoo!360, YouTube, cyword and Black Planet all emerged (Junco, Heibergert and Loken, 2011).

With the growing popularity of Social Media, following cases were studied and analysed in order to ascertain role of Social Networking Sites. These cases were randomly selected from the issues that appeared on Social Media scene from June 2011 to May 2013.

CASE I: DELHI RAPE CASE

The 2012 Delhi Gang Rape Case involves a rape and murder that occurred on December 16, 2012 in Munirka, a neighbourhood located in the southern part of New Delhi, when a 23-year-old girl was beaten and gang raped in a bus in which she was travelling with her male companion. The victim eventually died due to brutal behaviour of a few psychopaths.

Rage of people regarding this case was not only seen on roads by the way of protests, hunger strikes, etc., but it was also seen on social networking sites. People had started posting on Facebook and there were countless tweets on Twitter displaying their ire. Various virtual communities and pages were created online on social networking sites which clearly displayed the wrath of people all over India.

CASE II: EXECUTION OF AJMAL KASAB

Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab was hanged on November 21, 2012 in Pune's Yerwada jail. He was a Pakistani militant and a member of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), through which he took part in the vicious Mumbai terror attacks on the November 26, 2008.

The day the execution was carried out; it was crucial for the history of social media in Indian context because it was one of the unusual times when so many people from India and even outside were discussing the same event. There were questions asked and relief expressed on various social media websites. Social Networking websites gave people a platform to express and share their respective viewpoints. Users discussed the time of 4 years taken to carry out the punishment where the crime was proven in the courts beyond any doubts. At the same time, human right activists opposed the capital punishment even for the terror attacks of as high a magnitude as of Mumbai.

CASE III: SHAHEEN DHADA, RENU SRINIVASAN FACEBOOK CONTROVERSY
Mumbai police arrested 21-year old Shaheen Dhada for her Facebook post questioning the shutting down of Mumbai city and 20-year old Renu Srinivasan for liking it after a Shiv Sena leader filed an FIR against them for the comment. Shaheen Dhada was arrested for criticising the shutdown of Mumbai after the death of Bal Thackeray and her friend Renu Srinivasan was arrested for liking the post of her friend on Facebook. They were later freed on bail.

Much outrage was seen on Social Networking sites in respect to this issue. It was made clear by remarks of Press Council Chairman, Markanday Katju, that Shaheen and Renu had not breeched any law nor had intentionally hurt religious sentiments. Our constitutional right of- "Freedom of Speech" was reinforced with the help of people who raised their voice against this unjust deed.

CASE IV: EXECUTION OF AFZAL GURU
Mohammad Afzal Guru, who was hanged on February 9, 2013, was convicted by Indian court for December 2001 attacks on the Indian Parliament. The death sentence was served by a special Prevention of Terrorism Act Court in 2002. The hanging surprised the billion citizen nation and even the citizens living outside India and became one of the most talked about events of recent times on the social media websites.

People were sharing videos and pictures of those injured in the clashes after the execution was carried out. Users from Jammu and Kashmir also uploaded the insignias on Facebook; the campaign was similar to the one in 2010 when the youth of the valley used social media to mobilize protests in Kashmir region. Like in the case of Ajmal Kasab, the social media websites were stormed by the Netizens with their opinions about the execution, some calling it "dubious" and some calling it "decisive".

CASE V: IPL SPOT FIXING CASE
Indian Cricket was rocked by the arrest of Rajasthan Royals' S. Sreesanth, Ankeet Chavan and Ajit Chandila on charges of spot-fixing. Ankeet Chavan and Ajit Chandila were relatively new to the glamour that IPL brings but Sreesanth, a veteran of 27 Tests and 53 ODIs is an old horse familiar with all the aspects of the glamour associated with Indian Premiere League.

The people across the countries shared the videos of the matches spot fixed and also shared the videos where the players signalled the bookies that the spot fixing was on. The jaw dropping truth had the entire nation astounded. Social media users discussed various measures that should be taken to avoid such instances to happen again like extra security, keeping team briefings secret. People have become more active towards current issues prevailing not in their own nation but across the entire world. This has been possible due to availability of Social Networking sites which are making are world GLOCAL- Globally Local.

CASE VI: WINCONSIN, OAK CREEK, WI, SIKH TEMPLE ATTACKS
On August 5, 2012, Wade Michael Page fatally shot six people and wounded four others in a mass shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Page committed suicide by shooting himself in the head after he was shot in the stomach by a responding police officer.

People vented their anger through Social media. This outpouring of messages on social networking sites also showed how close people feel to the expatriates of their own country. Moreover, their were tweets and updates from people of other countries who stood united with friends and relatives of the victims on humanitarian grounds.

CASE VII: BALWANT SINGH RAJOANA'S STAY ON EXECUTION
Balwant Singh was a member of the Babbar Khalsa and a party to the assassination of the then Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh. Sixteen other persons died in the blast. He was arrested in December 1995, and sentenced to death in 2006. The High Court confirmed his death sentence in October 2010. He has spent the last 16 years in prison. He was sentenced to death by the special CBI court and execution was scheduled to take place on March 31, 2012. But the turning point occurred as the days of the execution drew near. The protests from various sections started demanding clemency for Balwant Singh. The President and the Prime Minister of India were approached seeking clemency keeping in view the law and order situation in Punjab, which was expected to deteriorate if the hanging took place. Finally, the hanging was postponed to avoid the violent clashes and the instability in the state.

The social networking websites provided a platform to the people in Punjab and even abroad to discuss an issue. It was a precarious situation where there were mainly two sets of users. First ones were those who wanted the hanging to take place and the second ones who wanted the commutation of capital punishment and justice for the 1984 riots. Both the sides had their own reasons, pros and cons. Social media paved way for discussion with total democratization of information or content.

CASE VIII: SARABJIT SINGH DHILLON MURDER
Sarabjit Singh was an Indian national tried and convicted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan for a series of bomb attacks in Lahore and Faisalabad that killed 14 bystanders in 1990. While imprisoned, Sarabjit claimed he was a farmer who strayed into Pakistan from his village located on the border, three months after the bombings. In 1991, Sarabjit Singh was given death penalty by a Pakistani court. Since his conviction in 1991, several mercy petitions had been filed by Sarabjit's lawyers. The fifth petition was filed on 28th May 2012. While in prison in April 2013, he was attacked by fellow inmates and died six days later at Jinnah Hospital, Lahore.

The social media websites united the Indians in grief over the loss of an innocent fellow Indian who was wrongfully convicted and murdered. It was one such event where the entire nation stood unified condemning those who did such a ghastly act.

CASE IX: INDIA AGAINST CORRUPTION
India Against Corruption (IAC) is a synergistic People's Movement formed to ensure a corruption free India. The apolitical movement has spawned a non-affiliated political party, the Aam Aadmi Party, after a split. This movement picked up pace with the participation of people from the entire country and awareness about it was catalysed by social media. The ability to mobilise large numbers in a short time is social media's biggest asset. Anna Hazare's `India Against Corruption' website had millions of calls conveying support. Each step of the whirlwind crisis was tweeted by its followers, right from arrests in real time or negotiations with the government. The Jan Lokpal Bill that the team campaigned for received tremendous publicity and support through its social media activists and followers.

CASE X: BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS

During the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013 two pressure cooker bombs exploded killing 3 people and injuring 264. The bombs exploded about 13 seconds and 210 yards (190 m) apart, near the finish line on Boylston Street. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) took over the investigation, and on April 18, 2013 released photographs and surveillance video of two suspects. The suspects were identified later that day as the Chechen brothers Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

The bombings were denounced and condolences were offered by many international leaders as well as leading figures from international sport. Security measures were increased worldwide in the wake of the attack. In China, users posted condolence messages on Weibo in response to the death of LüLingzi. Chris Buckley of The New York Times said "Ms Lu's death gave a melancholy face to the attraction that America and its colleges exert over many young Chinese." Laurie Burkitt of The Wall Street Journal said "Ms Lu's death resonates with many in China" due to the one-child policy. The news of this mishap spread like an epidemic on various virtual communities online.

CONCLUSION

Social networking sites have become a new source of keeping one connected and being updated about what is happening around. These are easy-to-grab platform for people to express their opinion. Cases examined during the study show that people unite for one cause via SNS and stand for sover-

eignty of the nation. Participation on these websites reminds us and makes us more aware about our rights and helps us share our beliefs and ideas. They help common man to raise his/her voice against the prevailing unjust practices and also for the advocating right things. These sites help people form their own opinion, educate them and inform them about happenings in the world.

In a nutshell, we can say that with the evolution of social networking sites, people have got their own media to raise their voice and stand for their rights. It is the new media that is for the people, by the people and of the people, and hence, it's the People's Media. It possesses the character of true democratization of information, where the dominant paradigm of communication loses its hold. The participatory nature of SNS cuts through caste and class barriers and yet does not disturb the typical idiosyncrasies inherent to various groups within the masses. These sites show a movement of massification towards individuation of news where the news are not just dealing with the masses but also with each individual as a unit. The top-down approach is replaced by the bottom-up communication and hence, in a way, it is Total Media. But as it is said, that along with rights and freedom come great responsibility, in the same way it is in our hands to make proper and just use of SNSs. It should be used for betterment of mankind and nation and should not be exploited for unjust causes.

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