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An Analysis of New Media's Role in Mass Movements (With reference to Anna Hazare's campaign 'India Against Corruption')

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Abstract

Mass movement refers to the concept which is supported by a large segment of population especially one which doesn't involve much of the elite section. In India itself, we have witnessed many movements beginning from the struggle for independence to the current Anna Hazare's Anti Corruption Movement. Media's inevitable role in success of a campaign is well established and plays a vital role to make any campaign a success. The definition of media in today's world has changed and it has turned into an integrated platform that deals with different modes of communication to make it more effective.

In context of Hazare's campaign; Internet & Social Media sites have been abuzz with articles/messages showing support for Anna Hazare's fight against corruption and his plea to pass Jan Lokpal Bill. For example–Facebook now has over 100 pages dedicated to Anna Hazare and his campaign. New media being a most popular media among the youth is giving new dimensions.

New media is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. Facebook is an example on the social media model, in which most users are also participants.

Present paper is an attempt to demystify the role of new media as a tool to increase reach of mass movements. For the purpose of study data was collected from various pages of social networking sites and analyzed on the basis of set parameters. A small survey is also conducted through purposive sampling technique to add the audience perspective into the study. Result of the study has interesting story about the new media as well as mass movement and both are complementing each other. Though new media users are very few in number, yet a large audience rates new media as the best available platform to voice one's opinion about a movement.

Introduction

New media may be defined as latest tool of communication which has all the aspects of decoding message effectively through integrated platforms. ''The rise of new media has increased communication between people all over the world and the Internet. It has allowed people to express themselves through blogs, websites, pictures, and other user-generated media [1]".

Dennis Macquil (1996) proposed media accountability for wider or long-term benefit to the society. He passed that mass media do serve the "public interest" of "general welfare" whether by design or by chance. This means in practice, that mass media is the same as any other business or service industry, but carry some essential task for the wider benefit of society, especially in cultural and political life [2].

The pioneering thinker about the media, Marshall Mc Luhan, coined the term, "The Global Village" in the 1960s to express his belief that electronic communication would unite the world. The advent of the Internet over the past 10 years has paralleled the emergence of globalisation as a concept. Proponents and critics of globalisation have very different perspectives on the Internet's role.

As per the opinion of Jones: Social entrepreneurs will progressively adapt new media and production structures by creating non territorial virtual communities around the world. Previously marginalized groups, ranging from rights activists to political dissident to digital artists, are connecting with each other through the Web to create meaningful social and political virtual communities [3].

Roderick Henrey (2003) argues: "As the left, right or mainstream, political propaganda knows no borders". Debates about social issues can be productively revisited in the context of asking "what is or not political propaganda" [4].

Jurgen Habermass suggested the term 'Public Sphere' where people could gather together to voice their own opinions and discuss political and social issues. In the digital era new media is often compared to Habermass's utopian idea of public sphere. The work of Marshall McLuhan was conceived of as the interaction of people, messages, and media systems within the ... that media ecology's notion of print culture is comparable to Habermas's idea of the bourgeois public sphere

When Marshall McLuhan first coined the phrases "global village" and "the medium is the message" in 1964 [5], no-one could have predicted today's information-dependent planet. No-one that is, except for a handful of science fiction writers and Marshall McLuhan. Cyberspace is becoming more and more user-friendly each day. William Gibson a science fiction writer coined the term cyberspace. The term was used to describe a world of global computer networks, linking all

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people, technologies and sources of information in the world, through which one could move and navigate as if through a virtual space [6].

"Virtual communities" are being established online and transcend geographical boundaries, eliminating social restrictions [7]. Howard Rheingold (2000) describes these globalised societies as self-defined networks, which resemble what we do in real life. "People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk" [8].

The Internet with its transnational many-to-many communication facility offers a revolutionary potential for social movements to go online and circumvent the 'official' messages of political and commercial organisations and the traditional media, by speaking directly to the citizens of the world [9]. Furthermore the use of electronic mail (e-mail), mailing lists, websites, electronic forums and other online applications provide powerful media tools for coordinating the activity of often physically dispersed movement actors [10]. Moreover, ICTs may also contribute to the important function of social movements of shaping collective identity and countering the claims and arguments of established political interests.

Objective of the Study

1. To understand increasing dependency upon new media for communicating social messages

2. To understand the intricacies of communication mix created through social networking sites

3. To evaluate qualitative aspect of communication spread through new media

4. To analyze the role of new media in mass movements

5. To know the effectiveness of new media in mobilizing people towards mass movements.

Research Design

For the purpose of study the paper has been divided into four different stages

Methodology of the study is following:

a. Extensive review of literature was done to collect information in order to understand the new media and movement relation and also get a fair understanding of the kind of research previously conducted on similar issues. For this researcher has consulted many libraries in Delhi-NCR and also national and international journals were reviewed which provided the exact feel of research problem.

b. Content of the websites and messages given on various social networking sites has been observed and analyzed in order to know its nature. Qualitative content analysis was conducted as per the need of the study. Content analysis is a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the content of written, spoken or published communication by systematic objective and quantitative analysis. Although news about such movements does not appeared daily but the discussion over the issue raised by Anna Hazare lasted for more than one month. Therefore the Sample of the webpages of 15 days i.e. from 16th August, 2011 to 30th August, 2011 has been selected for the purpose of the study.

c. To make deep understanding about New Media and its

applications, experience survey has been done by asking questions to the experts. Researcher identified and interviewed seven experts including new media teachers and industry people who are working for news websites.

• A survey has been conducted through purposive sampling technique to add the audience perspective into the study. Researcher has selected 50 people about their use of social networking sites. These 50 people include students, office goers, and housewives within the age group of 16 to 30.

Major Findings

The scale of "Anna Hazare movement on Social Media" was extended to remote south, East, North, and West. As respondents from every nook and corner of the country commented on the page which made the page most vibrant and hence real nature of participatory media came out. Analysis of 15 days (16th August, 2011 to 30th August, 2011), selected sample has reflected very interesting facts. Only Facebook witnessed 5.5 Lakh followers who just not only participated in the discussion but they have followed the posts daily during Hazare's fast at Ram Lila Ground in New Delhi. Twitter and other tags have also witnessed massive response on the same issue and hence complimented each other as far as reach and access of the message from team Anna is concerned.

The scale of "Anna Hazare movement on Social Media

Facebook.com/Annahazare - More than 2.3 Lakhs followers
Facebook.com/Indiacor - - More than 3.2 lakh followers
Twitter.com/Janlokpal(@Janlokpal) – About 35000 people follow @**Janlokpal** on twitter. More than 5000 tweets were published via @**Janlokpal**
Hashtag **#isupportannahazare** - more than 8000 tweets mentioned this tag in 24 hours after arrest of Anna Hazare
Hashtag **#janlokpal** - more than 9000 tweets mentioned this tag in 24 hours after arrest of Anna Hazare

It is observed that at one hand respondents were participating in the discussion and at other hand they were uploading the rare videos/ self made videos/ archived videos/ bytes of leaders and others. This means social media provided a platform where all form of media content was provided simultaneously. This convergent form of media has complimented other media also. Many news channels, newspapers and websites used visuals uploaded on you tube and they used tweets by celebrities while packaging news stories related to Anna Hazare's movement.

On the examination of comments and the audience participated it is found that 70 percent respondents commented on the updates on the page via their mobile set. Among this 70 percent more than 50% were witnessing the event at Ramlila Maidan or they were participating in the protest by Anna. This finding is indicating that due to convergence the barrier to new media use is subsided now. Mobile has become an intimate medium for the audience which helps them keep themselves updated and remain present in every fruitful discussion.

Discussions

Researcher asked some experts about the social movement led by Mr Anna Hazaare as this is the latest and current event of social movements in India. According to Mr. Pawan Koundal, Editor, Communicator, IIMC, Delhi "There are two aspects of this movement: one – the class who are familiar with computers and social networking sites and have accessed this kind of information and somehow participated actively or passively. But on the other hand who are not

familiar with this technology got full of information through mobile phone services. This means that social networking sites and mobile; the tools of new media influenced people in some manner or another to make their opinion revealed".

According to Mr Pawan Rana, Online Marketing Specialist at GetIt Infoservices "It is true that TV, Radio and Newspapers are giving people information about that event, but Social Networking Sites gave them the right to participate instantly on Internet, and its applications provide one a power to show their concern about the movement within one click away".

Dr. Ambrish Saxena, Founder of online community on Facebook "Solidarity with Media for Society" said that this tool is a very effective way of communication among the masses especially in the youth. Alone Facebook site has hundreds of pages dedicated to Anna Hazare and the India Against Corruption Campaign programme and have thousands of its members in terms of participation and discussions. I have never seen such kind of movement led by online vehicle which helps people to join hands together.

Ms Mehnaz Nasreen, Online Journalist in thesundayindian.com argues that she is not in much favor of this campaign because it has wiped out the other campaigns that are already going on for so many years. But she also agreed that new media tools and social networking sites have made this campaign a great success because these tools has the mass reach all over the world. When you are doing a protest electronically you also invite discussions and participation globally.

Mr Hemant Vashisht, Producer-Dill Aajtak.com said that the virtual world is gradually finding its social relevance and people notwithstanding their geographical location are able to analyze events across the world. The Anna Hazare campaign was the finest example of where people across the world have harnessed the Internet to express their views and communicate.

High-tech revolution of Anna Hazare against corruption

One of its kind, Anna Hazare "India Against Corruption" became the first ever campaign which hit the cyberspace to a great extent. Social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have done a lot. Facebook, already a massive hit in the country, has let people express their sentiments the way they want. A number of Facebook Pages have been created dedicated to Anna Hazare's movement. India Against Corruption (IAC), an NGO supporting the anti-graft campaign, owns a Facebook page and has more than 454,000 likes till the movement officially ended. And many other groups and communities have been created in the name of fight against corruption. People are tagging their friends in images and texts related to the cause. The democratic set-up has let everybody keep their views, whether one agrees or contradicts. Facebook tools such as "poll" have also been used extensively for garnering more public opinion. The dynamics of Facebook is such that one cannot simply ignore what others are doing. Internet & Social Media sites have been abuzz with articles/messages showing support for Anna Hazare's fight against corruption and his support for Jan Lokpal Bill. Facebook now has over 100 pages dedicated to Anna Hazare and his campaign and have garnered over 200,000 likes in just couple of days.

Twitter, the popular micro blogging site, has also pushed the movement further. Some of the recent hot trends in Twitter have been identified as hashtage: #isupportannahazare, #annahazare #kiranbedi #DelhiPolice #janlokpal. People were keenly following the updates on Anna Hazare's fast and how the political drama in Delhi has been unfolded.

There was a vital role of technology behind the scene which was created for 16th august. It is 4-5 month's hard work by team Anna who is sending messages through internet, phone to every citizen of India. In this SMS, email, and missed calls played a major role. Mumbai's Netcore Company provided its services to team Anna. Some of its services were free of cost. The company has used IBM technology to send bulk SMSs to lakh of people in one go. India Against corruption has paid 2 paisa/SMS to this company. Whereas company did not charged Team Anna for missed call services and it also did not charge for the phone calls in reply to missed calls from the people. This was the donation from the company for this revolution.

In the year 2009, 'Pink Chaddi Campaign' was similarly started on Facebook with registration of 2,900. The campaign raised its voice in favour of today's Indian women. It is interesting to observe the power of Online Campaigning.

On the other hand, a mobile application called "India Against Corruption" for Symbian and Android enabled phones has been launched which was a great way to support Anna Hazare and his movement. This mobile application is free available anyone can download it from the Ovi Store or Android Market

Celebritiy presence through Twitter

Some of the celebrities actively twittering in favour of Anna Hazare are:

• Anupuma Kher tweets, "On my way to Jantar Mantar, Delhi from Pune to pledge my support to Anna Hazare and more than One Billion INDIANS against corruption.:)"

• Farhan Akhtar tweets,"I support Anna Hazare. Our country has suffered from corruption for too long… NOW is the time we get together and do something about it."

• Rakesh Junjunwala tweets," Sharad Pawar has quit the GoM. I think he requested Anna Hazare to reduce his burden."

• IbnLive tweets, "A larger debate is required for the Bill #JanLokpal."

Youtube is not far behind–There have been hundreds of videos that have been uploaded in support of Anna Hazare's campaign. Even the Television News channels covered every second of this campaign. It is also for the first time that foreign Media (online as well TV) has given quite a bit of coverage.

More than 150 Facebook pages related to 'Anna Hazare' and 'India Against Corruption' have emerged in the last few months. Surprisingly, majority of these pages seem to be created by various enthusiasts, who do not form the part of Anna's official team.

(Facebook.com/joinanna), created by a Mumbai-based Facebook user named 'Mohammed Zaid Shaikh', is followed/liked by more than 38,000 users.

The official 'India Against Corruption' page (facebook.com/IndiACor) has managed to rope in more than 3.2 lakh fans, so far. More than 13,000 of these fans joined the page yesterday, and over 60,000 users joined it in the last 17 days. (The figures have been derived from Facebook Analytics tool named Buzzref.com).

According to Buzzref.com, the IAC Facebook page received over 71,000 'likes' and 13,000 comments for mere 170 posts updated in the

month of August. However, MTV India (Facebook.com/mtvindia, 2.9 million fans) and Dominos (Facebook.com/dominospizzaindia, 0.5 million fans) received 21,000 'likes' (for 59 posts), 11740 'likes' and 1568 comments (for 41 posts) respectively, during the same time.

Survey

• Researcher has selected 50 people about their use of social networking sites. These 50 people include students, office goers, and housewives within the age group of 16 to 35. It has been observed that 65% people use Facebook, 25% people are using Twitter and 10 percent people uses both.

• Study shows that people in general spend 2-3 hours a day on social networking sites. An effort has been made that how much time people generally devoted on social networking sites and the average result is 2-3 hours but it varies according to the age group

• The survey revealed that 78% people were mobilized for active participation in the mass movement while 64% people spread the message online and 20% did not make any response.

• The study revealed that 74% people found the new media as an effective way for the success of mass movement, 17% people did not think it as effective tool while the rest did not say anything on the issue.

Conclusion

As compared to other aspects of social movements New Media is becoming more significant and instant way of disseminating the information globally. The medium provided a larger platform to discuss the ongoing logjam and share a range of sentiments. The Internet has been arguably the most harnessed medium among all kinds and has seen the largest audience participation. It helped propagate the word outside India and drew much-needed global attention.

The virtual world is gradually finding its social relevance and people notwithstanding their geographical location are able to view/review/analyze events across the world. The massive turnout in the virtual world certainly indicates at the growing power of this media and its impact on the masses, especially the youth. The Internet is set to make the globe more coherent with its ever-increasing reach out to the nook and corners of the world.

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