



ASIAN JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

Available online at <http://www.asianjir.com>

*Received 28 July 2017;
Accepted 10 August 2017
Online August 2017*

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Research Article

Visual Communication

HASH TAGS, SHARES AND LIKES- THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The recent scenario of protests had become entirely virtual. Netizens show keen interest in liking, sharing, posting and joining groups, supporting or organizing protests related to any social issue. Researchers say that the cyber protests are not a complete replacement for real world action but they coordinate through social networking sites for better results. The successes of cyber protest are network expansion and providing an option for the user to share their opinion. Various Social Media researchers quote Egypt revolution unveiled the power of social networking sites and cyber protests. In 2011 the fall of Hosni Mubarak was made a great success with the help of technology as well as the participatory approach of the medium. It functioned as a connection between disconnected groups, globalizes the reach of the issue shared. This paper is a small approach to unveil the ideas and opinions shared through memes, posts, pictures and videos, updates and tweets regarding River Cauvery water dispute between Tamilnadu and Karnataka. The content were selected from selective posts which had hash tag #Cauveryissue, #WehateKarnataka, #Shameonyoukarnataka.

Keywords: Cyber Protests, Social media, Cauvery water dispute, Power of Social media, Tweets.

Citation: R. Anusuah (2017). Hash tags, Shares and Likes - The power of social media". Asian Journal of Innovative Research 2(2) 33-36.

INTRODUCTION

According to PEW research report the rise of Social media has an enormous effect in its users' Work, Political deliberation, Communication patterns, the information they share about themselves and the level of stress. India's average usage of Social Networking Sites is 2.5 hours per day. Every year the growth of SNS users through mobile phone hits 17% than the previous year. The recent innovation in mobile technology, growth of mobile internet data has put a lot of comfort on users who prefer mobile for SNS activities.

Engaging Facebook

Earlier interpersonal communication developed communication between two or more persons. The invention of technology brought vast change in communication as mediated communication.

Recent studies proved that social media influenced people using its power of fast communication (Paul Booth). There has been very big shift in the way and process of Communication, people prefer mediated communication either interpersonal or group communication. Trust is one of the major factors in social media communication. People who communicate information in social media has a greater level of trust on their online partners/ friends as well as the online environment itself. To engage in Facebook one not only need an account, but he need a great energy of observation and communication skill.

It is difficult a running a community newspaper. This article focuses on how Facebook engagement changes or encourages the user into an activist to raise his voice.

Social media: a platform for social activism

A research done on college freshers resulted with the findings that young people use sns especially Facebook for conflict resolution. Individuals consider face-to-face relationships as most effective and preferred method to communicate and resolve conflicts with others. (John. J. Drussel, 2012). Cyber-activism is a growing field of scholarly research now-a-days. New studies are now looking at social media as a tool for shaping social movements. Langman (2005) argued that the activists with basic computer knowledge use internet, social media and they perform various activities like demonstrations, public protests etc. social media technologies have been widely used to spread information in a short time. The reach of social media cannot be compared with any other mass medium. People indulge in social media to form a network in order to socialize themselves and stay connected with other people.

Social activism

“The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil. But those who watch them without doing anything” said by famous Theoretical Physicist Albert Einstein. Activism played a major role in reforming each and every society, Eastern, Western, Asian or any barbaric society to civilized one. Earlier people fought for freedom, equal rights, poverty and destroyed kingdoms using violence and non-violence methods of Activism. When an individual or a group of similar individuals got affected, suppressed or mutilated, people come together and fought against the system. Thus they grouped similar interested people using interpersonal communication or word of mouth. Those activisms took time to breakout into mass group activism, so called revolutions.

Today in this technology addicted world we still do have individuals or a group or a community still

affected, suppressed, oppressed, mutilated and mass destructed by the system.

“If you are neutral in situation of Injustice you have chosen the side of the side of the oppressor” said by an African social rights activist. People communicate their emotions and ideas on certain issues which affect them or their community. The raise of social media encourages them without any cost.

Revolutions through Social Media

Social media acts as an important communication channel with the traditional mass media, which access up-to-date information on protests via social networks and disseminated it to mass audience through their own channels. Various researchers have different opinion regarding the role of social media in civic participation and social activism.

Cyber-activism movements started in mid 2000's, while social networking sites were getting popular among the Techno-savvies. Those movements include antiwar, anti-globalization, awareness movements etc. Internet also enabled various democratic groups and movements which included activists more than 1,00,000 in Brazil in 2003 and in Mumbai in 2004 (Langman 2005).

Cauvery Water Dispute

Fighting for natural resources is not a surprising issue these days. World wars are being initiated because of lack of resources of overuse off certain resources. Indian states had been parted in early days as they were ruled under several kingdoms. When the British came along and shattered the kingdoms into one country. After independence the rulers decided to divide the states according to the language of the residents. During this partition various natural resources i.e land, river, Sea boundaries were put under disputes.

According to the agreement signed 1892 and 1924, Tamilnadu and Karnataka should share Cauvery river water (Cauvery Basin: Central Water Commission, 2014). The dispute has not been solved properly till now which leads to protests and riots every decades. In 2016 Tamilnadu government approached Supreme Court to direct Karnataka government for releasing Cauvery water, which resulted in Karnataka government's denial to release water as they pleaded that the water is scarce enough only for Karnataka State's drinking purpose only. In September 12, 2016 SC directed Karnataka to release 15000 cu.sec water per day for the next 10 days to Tamilnadu.

Supreme Court's order created a rigorous turmoil among Kannadigas. They observed abdicate (bandh) and protest against Tamilnadu government. Similarly Tamilians, especially the farmers of the Cauvery Delta region observed protests. Several riots took palace in Karnataka and Tamilnadu. Both the

state's people accused each other and the riots grew worse every day. Apart from discussing the real situation of the both states, people and the Media started to accuse each other. The protest got aggravated as SC's second order was released dodging Karnataka government and increased the days of water to be released.

Later SC setup a committee named Cauvery Supervisory committee to monitor the two state's water dispute. Again Karnataka refused to release water. A special session was arranged in Karnataka Legislative Assembly to pass a resolution against Tamilnadu defying Supreme Court's order.

Protests and Riots in Tamilnadu and Karnataka

Violence and riots erupted in various districts of Karnataka after SC's order for releasing water until September 20, 2016. This riot caused several damages to the property as well as few lives of both Tamil and Karnataka people.

Young men waving red and yellow flags crammed vehicles which had Tamilnadu registration number. Kannadigas in Tamilnadu, their vehicles, business firms, and residents were crammed by Tamil Protestants.

In September 12, a mob attacked and burnt 42 buses in Bengaluru. The depot was set fire where Tamilnadu registration buses were parked. Those buses belonged to a Tamilnadu based private transport company. Fortunately no human lives were lost.

Several incidents like assaulting Karnataka and Tamilnadu men pelting stones on vehicles happened during September and October.

Protests in Social Media

Social media reflected the media as well as individual's opinions. People from Tamilnadu created so many hashtags against Karnataka government. Some of the hashtags are #Wehatekarnataka, #Cauveryissue #Shameonyoukarnataka. Videos, news links, opinions were tagged with these hashtags as they could easily be identified with related messages.

On September 10, hashtag WeHateKarnataka trended in Twitter. Thousands of Tweets, posts, Memes, videos were shared along with hashtag WeHateKarnataka and ShameonyouKarnataka. These trends gained national importance as the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah Tweeted not to support this hate campaign.

METHOD

The method adopted for this study is Content analysis. The content selected through Boolean search using search engines (Google & Yahoo), Facebook pages. The search criteria included hashtags #Wehatekarnataka, #Cauveryissue #Shameonyoukarnataka. Textual analysis, pictorial analysis was used.

Results and Discussions

In total 275 picture memes and 243 text posts were included for the analysis. The memes included contents on shame, protest, ban Karnataka vehicles in Tamilnadu and evacuate Karnataka people from Tamilnadu, stop supplying electricity to Karnataka etc. Very few text posts included detailed information on the history of Cauvery river disputes, farmers' problem due to draught. Most of the posts had hate speech against Karnataka people and Government.

| Themes | Memes | Posts |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| Shame | 45 | 70 |
| Karnataka Nazis | 30 | 47 |
| Immature Karnataka people | 73 | 40 |
| Abusive words | 90 | 12 |
| Farmer's pain | 37 | 74 |
| Total | 275 | 243 |

In 25th of January 2011, thousands of Egypt citizens were on the street against the Authoritarian government of Hosni Mubarak, who kept the country under dictatorial rule for 30 years. It is widely believed and said that social media played a major role there are a number of other factors and activities that contributed to the development of events that triggered the protests. The discussions against the government in Facebook and Twitter started at 2009 where the civic population became totally fed up with the long run dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak and his son Gamal who was strongly believed to be his successor. Blogging, Tweets, and Facebook posts made the protests know to each and every Netizens. This century's most popular revolution began at Egypt on January 25 which brought out the importance of social networking sites and the power of Tweets.

Similar scenario was observed in Tamilnadu from September to October 2016. People supported Tamilnadu farmers and the protesters who fought against Karnataka Government. Memes and Posts flooded in Social media from the first week of September. Meme creators created several memes to support the protest.

Most of the memes carried abusive words against Karnataka people, Government officials, Film Actors who stood against releasing Cauvery water, Karnataka people who attacked Tamil people, Tamilnadu registered vehicles. Some of the Memes carried unbiased content like discussing the current situation of Karnataka irrigation, i.e reduced rainfall in Karnataka, these memes and posts were shared less in numbers.

CONCLUSION

Social media revolution has a great impact on people especially on the youth's mind. Memes and hashtags serve as a new weapon of the revolutionists against the odds. People now-a-days believe social media can bring a notable change. In Cauvery issue the protesters took control over social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The user generated content had a notable amount of bias and Hate speech. The invention of Social media brought a complete freedom of speech among people; it provided a platform to express the ideas and thoughts. There should be a clear boundary between Freedom of speech and Hate speech, as hate speech hurts and attacks the feelings of many on basis of race, religion and boundary which may be a State boundary or a Nation's boundary.

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