



Digital Activism and Youth Political Participation in Rural India

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Abstract

Digital activism is the use of electronic communication technologies such as social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, YouTube, e-mail, and podcasts for various forms of activism to enable faster communications by citizen movements and the delivery of local information to a large audience. It is the use of electronic communication technologies for cause-related fundraising, community building, lobbying, and organizing. The past few decades have given scholars a rich collection of data that can help them analyze political change, whether Latin America in 1980s and 1990s, the former Soviet Bloc after 1989, Africa since the 1990s, or the Arab Spring in 2011. It was the last transformation, however, that has galvanized researchers to assess activism and upheaval in the context of the digital age. Even though the 2011 wave was not, of course, the first time that digital tools were used, what made the Arab Spring a compelling case was that citizens had more hardware on hand than before to spread their movement. Thus, it is believed to be high time for our youngsters to take the responsibility in their hands and make the national politically aware; and this idea can be executed better through no other medium but 'Digital activism through social media'

KEYWORDS Digital Activism, social media, political awareness, Youth, Citizen

DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Internet activism (also known as online activism, digital campaigning, digital activism, online organizing, electronic advocacy, cyber-activism, e-campaigning and e-activism) is the use of electronic communication technologies such as social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, Youtube, email and podcasts for various forms of activism to enable faster communications by citizen movements and the delivery of local information to a large audience. Digital and internet technologies are used for cause-related campaigning, fundraising, community building, lobbying and dissemination of information in large scale.



MEDIA: AN INTRODUCTION

Media is one of the most powerful instruments of communication. It can help to promote the right things on right time and gives a real as well as strong aspects of the world about what is right or wrong also it also express that how can we store and distributes the views. The world is moving towards progress in every step of life. But we cannot refuse the real fact that we all are bounded directly or indirectly with the loads of social problems and issues, which are affected by the people of the people and for the people.

The media is an important source of information through its news segments, entertainment and allows for exchange of our ideas, suggestions and views for related matters. There is huge variety of media.

We have access to news from all around the world and readers are invited to send their views and contributions to be published in the media. The term media is derived from Medium, which means carrier. Media denotes a links specifically designed to reach large viewers. The term was first used with the advent of newspapers and magazines. However, with the passage of time, the term broadened by the inventions of radio, TV, cinemas and Internet. And presently, it is the age of the social media.

In this fast moving world, it is becoming tough for people to dedicate an hour in front of a news channel listening to news. People want everything while on the move. Nowadays devices like mobile phones, tablets and other such gadgets have the world compressed in them. They provide the users with all the information they would want to have. Every other person is seen atleast with a mobile phone in hand.

In the world of today, media has become almost as necessary as food and clothing. It is true that media, specially the Digital media is playing an outstanding role in strengthening the society. Its responsibility is to inform, educate and entertain the people. It helps to know current situation around the world. The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society. Because of its inherent ability to reach large number of public, it is widely used to convey message to build public opinion and awareness, it can be used to educate people with very little cost.

Media play an important role in increasing of public awareness and collect the views, information and attitudes toward certain issue. Media is the most powerful tool of communication in emerging world and increased the awareness and presents the real stage of society. In this decade of Knowledge and awareness there is a huge and grand role of media, Without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but would also not be able to create a more responsible society.



SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2004, Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook as a way to connect with fellow students. Initially adopted by high school and college students, the social network, according to its 2012 initial public offering filing, has grown to 845 million active users worldwide, with approximately 161 million active monthly users in the US, making it the premiere social media service in the world. If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest behind China and India. Launched in July 2006, Twitter is an online social networking and micro blogging service that has grown to over 300 million users as of 2011, according to account tracker Twopcharts. It allows users to exchange photos, videos, and messages of 140 characters or less. Founded in 2005 by Steve Chen and Chad Hurley, YouTube provides a forum for the distribution of video content – everything from first-run television programs to eyewitness videos of political protests. The two created the site based on their own frustration when trying to share video files.

Part of the attraction of these “big three” social media services and independent blogging is that the average person, with little or no advanced computer skills, can have good success using them; content can be created and accessed with as little as a smart phone; and it can be easily intertwined. Links to videos posted on YouTube can be embedded in blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. A Twitter post can appear on a Facebook page. In other words, large numbers of people can be easily and inexpensively contacted via a variety of services.

Social media also lowers traditional socio-economic barriers to commanding the spotlight. You don't have to “be somebody” to “be somebody” on social media.

Google+ is Google's new Social Networking service which was launched on June 28th, 2011. For quite a long time Google was trying to develop a Social Network that would help them compete directly with Facebook and enter the Social Networking business. This new service integrates the various social services that Google launched over the years (Google Profiles, Google Buzz, +1 button) and it introduces several new features such as the social Circles, Sparks and Hangouts. The service is accessible not only via desktop computers but also via Tablets and Mobiles (both Android and iOS). The network allows users to add their contacts into groups, to organize group video chats, to upload video, photos, posts etc and to share interesting content.

Most leading social media channels, such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter and YouTube, cater to worldwide audiences. No information can be limited by the geographical demarcations and boundaries. Politicians, regimes, and activists look to purposefully tap into the potential of social media. The Internet, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook have re-constituted, especially among young people, how social relationships are constructed and how communication is produced, mediated, and received. They have also ushered in a new regime of visual imagery in which screen culture creates spectacular events just as much as they record them. Under such circumstances, state power becomes more porous and there is less control. Text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the Internet have given rise to



a reservoir of political energy that posits a new relationship between the new media technologies, politics, and public life. These digital technologies influence the formation and activities of civil society groups: mobs, movements, and civil society organizations. While mass popular protests or raising of demands are by no means a new phenomenon, digital tools are facilitating their formation.

IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN POLITICAL AWARENESS

Politics is a part of the society that we, as citizens, cannot do away with. The present political scenario in India is such that most people from the urban societies restrict themselves from voting; and we cannot claim that those elected are the most deserving ones and are the true representatives of the people. People abstain from voting because of many reasons but the most important one being lack of awareness.

We often hear people saying that whoever might be on the Chair, things will only get worse for common people. Most of the people think that they are unaffected by the change in the political regimes. Further, with cases of corruption and scams coming up every now and then, people have lost faith in the political structure of the country.

It is only through digital activism that masses of people, especially the youth who are the future of our nation, can be made aware of the consequences of such callousness in their attitude towards politics. It is time they should be inspired to stand up and raise their voices against the prevalent systems. They should take the strings in their hands and take up the responsibility to make the citizens politically aware. People should realize that if they want; change is possible.

Today digital platforms are used across the full spectrum of online activism. From local political campaigns to dynamic global social movements, digital is playing a part, although to varying degrees of success.

As Malcolm Gladwell astutely noted in 2010, digital networks aren't always the best tool for binding committed social movers to a cause. While networks are resilient and adaptive, he says, they tend to lack the clear strategies, hierarchy and strong ties that power committed social movements (that often require supporters to risk personal harm or sacrifice).

It's important to note that supporters can engage a campaign through numerous entry points. What digital networks may lack in strong ties, they make up in awareness, participation, fundraising and organizing – and can act as the on-ramp for new committed supporters that seek stronger ties. Digital activism may not adequately prepare a supporter to stoically sit at a 1960 whites-only lunch counter, but the brand can still offer clear utility to engage.

In order to best leverage digital tools and platforms, the online experience must engage a supporter in two fundamental ways. First, the medium and the message must be authentic to the movement's (sometimes nascent) brand and fit the larger narrative. This is



often achieved through employing an operative language that makes sense to the local supporters, but also offers them something of value, like inside information, a perceived proximity to the seat of power, or simply being able to connect with previously unknown affinity groups.

The second key factor is that the digital experience either fits current human behaviour, or changes behaviour in a way that creates a rewarding experience. Digital tactics that comfortably fit the previous habit of supports – e.g. tweeting daily events – will be more readily picked up and appreciated by supporters if they don't require learning a new system – or worse, using a platform or tool without a strategy and simply because others are using it. Digital tactics that promote a change of behaviour, for example readily offering up personal information on Facebook for sharing, often amplify some pre-existing behaviour or desire.

The media has got a vital role in moulding a good society to develop our lifestyle and move it on the right path, because it always try to side with the truth and relevant factor. It is the best tool to spread awareness in the modern society either it be political, social or economic and giving us latest insight about what is happening in our world, making us aware about our rights, creating awareness against evils in our society, what new happening around us, exposing corrupt politicians and hardcore criminals by sting operations. There is correlation between media and society to share them self about the past, present and future event on need base method of the society. Now a days we have a power to see everything of the society and to share it among the people only the good approach of media. So Media and their function have been changed as because there is a competition among the Media also. The main purpose of this paper is to explain the real feature of growing techniques of information and used it to spread the awareness. Its limitless connectivity and potential has open social order and system of interaction and communication which have been made a possible way to develop the communication technology and define the social situation of awareness. It can reap the benefits of technological advancement and try to make India a politically aware nation through the proper utilisation of Digital activism through social media.

YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

The absence of meaningful research on youth political engagement in India has led young people to be labelled as an 'apathetic' generation like youngsters in other democracies. Therefore, it is necessary to mention that, while declining political engagement is not simply a European or American phenomenon, research reveals that India's younger generation is less indifferent when it comes to politics and is just as likely to participate in electoral activities as older generations (Kumar, 2014). Findings from the World Bank's 2007 World Development Report on political participation in high-income and low-income countries reflect this argument by demonstrating that youth from lower-income countries are generally more politically active. How is this possible? Why is youth participation relatively high in India? Furthermore, what do we observe in Kerala in terms of youth engagement? Are young Keralites as politically disengaged as peers from higher-income countries, or do they emulate patterns of political participation observed in low-income countries?



The character of youth political participation in India has changed significantly over the last ten years. This change became apparent during the 2014 National Election, which witnessed an impressive turnout of young people in national politics. 2014's high participation rate could be explained by the mobilising efforts of several National parties beginning in the early 2010s. Other factors that might explain the rise of youth political engagement in India could be related to the country's steady socio-economic improvements. Most scholars agree that educated and wealthier people have more time, money, knowledge, and access to political information, becoming more politically active (Verba et al., 1995; Norris, 2002). Looking at India's current socio-economic profile, we see that, economically, India's economy continues to liberalise and grow at a tremendous speed, earning it the title of the world's fastest-growing economy. India has also made significant progress in improving its educational system. Furthermore, advancements such as social media and the internet have altered how the youth consumes information; Nowadays, the youth have additional channels to acquire political knowledge and express their concerns about public issues more quickly and conveniently than before.

While multiple factors have contributed to the remarkable rise in voter turnout, from 58 per cent in 2009 to 66 per cent in 2014, many researchers still maintain that, although not being apathetic toward politics, the numbers are still not high enough to consider young Indians as politically involved citizens (Kumar, 2014).

While this may be the case in India, we must consider that all-India figures hide complex regional differences. Therefore, this thesis will deal with the intricacies of youth participation in one state, Kerala. This Southwestern state's social progressiveness offers its inhabitants unique opportunities in the socio-economic field and has likely influenced political participation rates among the youths. It is, therefore, fascinating to examine political participation in this context and uncover whether the so-called 'Kerala model of development' (Parayil, 2000), which came to be lauded for progress in human development (Jeffrey, 1992; Dreze & Sen, 1995; Parayil, 2000), has generated patterns of deteriorating political engagement like established democracies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Political participation, meaning democratic engagement and its impact on processes and happenings in the struggle for how society should be constituted, is a multifaceted and contentious subject that can be viewed from various perspectives. Generally, the active engagement of politically aware individuals is widely recognised as a distinguishing feature of democratic citizenship (Verba et al., 1995). According to Verba and Nie (1972), the more society is involved in decision-making, the 'more' democracy there is.

This argument that citizen participation is vital to a smooth-running democracy is assumed from a popular conception of democracy. The primary tenet of the popular democracy theory is that a political system should encourage as many citizens as possible to



participate in decision-making (Verba et al., 1995). Following this perspective, unless individuals participate in the debate on public policy and their choices shape political action, democratic procedures are meaningless. Moreover, without the people's political participation, democracy loses both its legitimacy and its guiding force (Barber, 1984).

On the other side of the spectrum, social scientists claim that citizens alone are ineffective actors and should therefore play a limited role in the political space and rely on expert representatives. This elitist conception of democracy would seem a bit old fashioned; however, the elitist debate on democracy is integral in determining whether Indian political elites support or discourage young people from being politically active citizens. Regardless, the popular idea of democracy is particularly relevant in contextualising the findings of this thesis because it presents a persuasive justification for why involvement is desired for all citizens – especially new generations of young people.

PROBLEM: LACK OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

While many social scientists vouch for the active engagement of all citizens for a democracy to properly function, they are simultaneously witnessing the problem of low youth participation throughout the democratic world. Over the last decades, scholarly debates across democratic nations have focused on young people's political involvement, and many of these studies confirm that the younger generation is indeed less likely to vote in elections than their older counterparts (Marsh et al., 2007; Dalton, 2008; Farthing, 2010). Young people's reluctance to vote is echoed in other formal political activities as well; Young individuals exhibit lower party identification and are less likely to join political parties or come in personal contact with politicians (Norris, 2003; Henn and Foard, 2012); young citizens are less likely to participate in traditional institutions such as labour unions and religious denominations (Putnam, 2001); lastly, some research even goes as far as accrediting adolescents with an insufficient degree of political knowledge compared to older individuals (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995). For some, this decline in youth engagement in mainstream politics is associated with the hypothesis of youth apathy. This view assumes that the youth are politically ignorant since numerous young individuals are disengaged from political activities, show low levels of political concern and are poorly represented at all levels of government.

CONCLUSION

It is true that out of the entire Indian population only a slice of it uses the digital medium actively but very soon the day is not far when Internet and computers will spread into the remotest of villages just like the state of mobile phones in present times. And with the facility of internet in mobile phones the internet and digital media has already got a fillip; which if tapped properly, we can have a nation where every citizen is politically aware.



Youth and politics are constantly misinterpreting each other. For some, 'politics' has become synonymous with a narrow interpretation of partisan political behaviour. Considering the decrease in voter turnout, it is hardly surprising that the youth would be deemed 'apathetic' towards politics. However, these charges of political apathy fail to interpret youth activism and unconventional political engagement back into traditional politics. Therefore, instead of 'dropping out' of politics, we should consider shifting youth political participation to include broader incentives. While most research on youth politics has been conducted in European and American contexts, this Thesis aimed to contribute to the growing literature on youth politics in less developed countries such as India. In this country, similar patterns of youth apathy were noticed. However, rising numbers of youth voters, youth activism and overall efficacy in recent years indicate the growing importance of politics in the youth's daily lives.

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