

Effectiveness of Social Media in Promoting Human Rights: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Promoting human rights is a vital means to ensure their protection and respect. In the 21st century, the word 'promotion' by itself is simply associated with the media. With the wide range access to different types of media and with the ever growing interest of the people to keep abreast of the topics of the day, the media has become irreplaceable choice to spread information of any kind. A person's perception of reality is the result of their beliefs and in the age of information many of the beliefs are the result of the mainstream media. In last few years social media has played important role in the protection of democratic values and human rights. Social media is increasingly helpful to not only monitor emerging human rights emergencies, but also to uncover incorrect information. Crowd sourced expertise from social media can open up new opportunities for human rights organizations. Digital revolution and the emergence of social media that has significant implications for human rights work. Journalists, human rights researchers cannot cover all places at once and may be denied access to a potential human right incidents altogether. The surge in citizen journalism and social media platforms over the last decade has led to the evidence of a torrent of potential human rights violations. The main objective of this paper is to investigate and analyze the role of social media in the promotion of human rights and discuss the importance of a free Internet to the promotion of human rights and freedom of expression.

Keywords

Social Media, Citizen Journalism, Human Rights

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Introduction

The article 19 of universal declaration on human rights (UNO, 1948) and International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966) have acknowledged the free flow of information, freedom and pluralism of the media, and the freedom of expression and speech as human rights. These rights are very crucial and vital to protect the human rights of common people suffering from social disparities, suppression and sidelined by the dominant class. Despite of making commitments for human rights protection India has significant problems of human rights violation. ' There are increased restrictions on Internet freedom, continued marginalisation of Dalits, tribal groups, religious minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities; and persistent impunity for abuses linked to insurgencies, particularly in Maoist areas (West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh), Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, and Assam' (www.hra.org front page).

India has a vast and strong mainstream media. It plays crucial role in political change and agenda setting of the democracy. Indian mainstream media is a complex institution where number of factors play decisive role in its functioning. If we look at the growth of mainstream media in India ownership and control dimensions, representational dimensions, general social structural dimensions, and regulatory frameworks have been decided their line of action, understanding, and picking and presentation of human rights issues. It is popular notion that mainstream media in India is functioning under the parental guidance of state and effective control of market forces. Support the purpose of the state and follow the agenda of the stakeholders and investors has been seen as one of the main philosophy behind functioning of mainstream media. ' The significant corporate power and economic clout wielded by media owners has led to the perception that the media is a force vying for power outside the political process, ([south_asia_roundtable_report.pdf](#), page 10).

The pattern of guidance has influenced the power of mainstream media to examine and present the reality with principles of objectivity and reliability. This dynamics of power and market has set a gauge for mainstream media and often resulted in presentation of guided reality. This dominant framing of human rights tries to draw a pro- establishment vision for media and sometimes justifies the non-reporting of human rights violation of marginalized people, groups, minorities and people with different political view. Such obligations and control dynamics restricts the ability of mainstream media so issues of human rights sometimes overlooked or covered inappropriately.

On the other hand social media has emerged as a powerful tool of public interaction with no or minimum limitations and free from such restrictions. With its collaborative and interactive model of communication

social media has become one of the most preferred platforms of human communication now days. With mainstreaming of social media availability of information has become faster and available to each and every user who is connected to the network. Social media or digital media has altered the practice of conventional models of human interaction and role of communication in political and social change. 'Digital media changed the tactics of democratisation movements, and new information and communication technologies played a major role in the Arab Spring' (Howard & Hussain, 2011)

'Social media is an important new tool for promoting social and political change. Social media allows eyewitness accounts to be made widely available and expands access to information. Reporting is no longer confined to traditional sources of journalism. Through social media information has spread faster and farther, available now to local, regional and global audiences. In the context of human rights movements, this element of spreading messages and bringing attention to a cause is crucial' (Yeaza, 2014)

Social Media and Human Rights: Success Stories

Social media is being utilized by various organizations and activists for mobilization, information and connecting with like-minded people around the world. 'Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) uses social media for online mobilizing and urgent human rights emergencies. For example, AIUSA used Twitter (and storify) to successfully prompt a statement from the United States Departments on imprisoned activists in Bahrin- and to report back to activist in real time. This one of many examples of the strategic use of social media by human rights groups' (www.newtactics.org) indicates its importance as the forum of communicating human rights issues by established organizations.

'Human Rights Campaign'- an organization working for online and offline mobilization of public and 'to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender American' (www.hrc.org) has also used social media at global level to gain the public support. The HRC changed its iconic logo on their Facebook page to red to show support the marriage equality debate. 'The red logo immediately went viral as people everywhere shared the photo and changed their Facebook profile photo to the image in support of marriage equality' (www.postano.com). The campaign was heart touching and has successfully secured over 114 million views, 3rd most shared Ad of all time. Campaign was uploaded in 25 languages and seen in 110 countries and 1,800 blog posts were written about the campaign.

India has witnessed the power of social media in Nirbhaya case. Social media has raised awareness, stimulated debate, changed the attitudes of public and a massive movement was generated against the horrific-rape case that has

also changed the directive and action for respect and protection of women in India. Social media and online communication tools were utilized to inform, mobilise and organise people and case became focus on across the media platforms.

Recently a social media campaign has gone viral after two gang rape videos went viral on whatsapp. The videos were later uploaded on You Tube and Facebook by social activist Sunitha Krishanan, asking people to help identify the alleged rapists. Immediately Supreme Court of India taken up the case and asked the CBI to register a case and immediately investigate the video.

Success of such cases and many more other cases tell the strength and effectiveness of social media used as a weapon of protection of human rights and creating awareness on the issues of social interest. Most mainstream human rights organizations, activists, and campaigners use social media as important part of their information and communication activities. Facebook, Twitter and many more social media platforms have been used to share information, advocacy and calls for action. The Arab springs and the Anna Hazare movements are best examples of using social media to spread messages of human rights, and mobilize people for action against political suppression and the corruption. Social media has played a key role in the Egyptian revolution in the year 2011. 'Social media introduced speed and interactivity that were lacking in the traditional mobilization techniques, which generally include the use of leaflets, posters, and faxes. For instance, social media enabled domestic and international Egyptian activists to follow events in Egypt, join social-networking groups, and engage in discussion' (Eltantway & Wiest, 2011).

Citizen journalism is not new phenomenon. In the early 1990, Rodney King case was a well know example of citizen journalism. All citizens are journalists and they can promote human rights though social networking. Sometime we see that how the government has monopoly over media; however, the government cannot have monopoly over all the citizens. Hence, the citizen journalism could be used as an alternative media to promote human rights.

User-generated content shared over social media is vital to the advancement of human rights by increasing awareness, encouraging action and providing evidence of abuses so perpetrators can be held to account. Despite the value of this type of media, existing technologies are restrictive of activists and grassroots organizations, meaning there is room for innovation to better accommodate the needs of these communities.

These platforms are valuable tools to modern protest movements, allowing communication and organization between activists. But content shared on social media related to these movements is equally valuable to the traction of

human rights campaigns. A compelling piece of citizen journalism shared through a peer-to-peer network can act as a rallying cry, galvanizing supporters and influencing bystanders, creating a ripple of influence that causes others to stand against violations and attempt to change the status quo.

The Human Rights Commissions of different countries have also embraced social media to provide instant and accessible support for needy people. Some have given facility to register online complains, get updates on the cases, statistics, and the actions and e-learning portals to be acquainted with procedures, rules, rights and remedies. On the website of National Human Rights Commission one can register complains, search status of complaint updates and activities of the NHRC.

Objectives

The present paper is an attempt to attain the following objectives with the help of analysis of the relevant data-

1. Evaluating the role of social media in protection of the human rights
2. Effectiveness of social media to encourage and motivate people for human rights protection
3. Analysis of behavior of profiles and nature of communication for human rights protection through social media

Methodology

A content analysis research design was selected to complete the study. The main purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory content analysis of the use of Facebook as a tool of information, sensitization and mobilisation of public for protection of the human rights. The study was conducted by collecting one month's posts from the selected Facebook profiles or pages of the activists or organizations working for human rights protection in India. From the list available on the NHRC website (core group NGOs) page/profile (http://nhrc.nic.in/Documents/NGO_CORE.pdf) and CRY (Child Rights and You) was selected and the contents posted from 1st to 20th February, 2017 was analyzed with the help of subject, proximity, nature- informative or analytical, approach- text, audio-visual, photograph, graphics or mixed, and source of the post. The result was presented by using simple percentage analysis.

Data Analysis

From the wall of the CRY page total 43 posts analysed which were posted during the month of February 2017. Type of updates, subject of the

updates, Nature of updates and source or origin of the updates was selected as the criterion of the analysis. Under the type of the updates nature of the content presentation i.e. only video updates, only text updates, only picture updates, updates using picture-cum-video, and picture-cum-text update categories were used for analysis and interpretation of data. Under the subject category data were arranged into issues related with official negligence/torture, political suppression, women empowerment, girl education/girls rights, personal information, organizational information, child trafficking, supporting women/marginalized /weaker/disabled people, child rights, and comments on the current political activities.

To show the familiarity of the user with social media origin of the content i.e. originated by self, referred material, shared from other online sources, and use of hyperlink is used.

As the data reveals most of human rights activists through their personal profile and pages of organisations prefer to provide newsfeed or status updates in text-cum-pictures mode. This pattern is observed greater in feeds from pages than the feeds by individual profiles. Video feed facilities found less explored by both individual profiles and organizations.

Subject wise variety of newsfeeds and status updates were observed on all walls. On the CRY page most of stories were addressing the issues of girls' education, child rights and organizational activities

Data pointed that Human right activists and organisations use social media to promote their issues, thoughts, and programmes and to connect and sensitize the likeminded people. Most of posts appeared in shape of newsfeed that is indicating the placement of good length posts on the wall. Social media used for mobilising support from the connected people is found as the second preference therefore it can be generalised that social media is positively used by human rights activists to inform the people concerning new happenings, issues of interest, latest developments. Social media is also used immobilising and sensitising people on the human rights issues.

In Facebook communication like a post on Facebook is an easy way to let people know that a person is enjoying the content without leaving a comment. During the month of February the wall of CRY page gets 15606 likes, 1215 shares, and 192 comments were scored. The data indicates that a good number of people are enjoying by giving likes on the posts or updates. On the basis of the data we can say that with regular updates by profiles and pages can secure good support of the engaged users and this rate is high for personal profiles than the pages of organizations or business. These engage users not only support the cause, also the visibility of the post is increased and such bumping posts spread among friends of friends too.

Discussion

Social media platforms have given activists and organizations opportunity to draw attention to the issues concerning to them. It has literally lent voice to the people who otherwise had no means to convey their grievances or put their ideas across. It has exactly provided voice to people who otherwise had no means to convey their criticisms or place their ideas across. Social media provides 24x7 connectedness in an interactive manner where a community and support can be created and sustained. It helps people and organizations to garner the valuable public support around their activities by sensitizing them, mobilizing them and prepare them for action and change.

Katz and Lazarsfeld have established that 'the formation of well-considered political opinions is a two-step process. The first step requires access to information; the second, use of that information in conversation and debate' (Katz, Lazarsfeld; 1970).

Under this framework the findings suggest that social media profiles of the activists and organizations are attempting to sensitize the people to form the positive opinion by informing and motivating them on the critical human rights issues that is widely accessible and more people than ever are able to develop their point of view on such issues.

Social media platforms, with mainstreaming of the social media have become a cultural space for communicators and they use it to convey the meaning, languages, ideas, and expressions, remix activities on human rights issues mentioning from irony to criticism and motivational stories, from cozy places to the frontline. It has been observed by the engagement patterns of the users that the culture of generating and sharing, practices of crowd sourcing, and the forms of collective production are contributing new forms of human rights literacy, new forms of knowledge and ultimately new forms of solidarity, social awareness and reflexivity on human rights issues. This communication corresponds successfully to the rights of members to freely participate in the creation, and sensitization of the community without pressure of gatekeeping of the mainstream media or censorship issues by other agencies.

Social media also constitutes space for community sharing large human rights contents, and, as the analysis shows are often extensively used as platforms for information, education, distributing, and exploring public support. In this way social media also contributes to the formation of human beings as competent members of a community by mobilising and supporting them in gaining critical intellectual capacities to participate in the political and cultural spaces of their online and offline communities for human rights support.

Freedom of expression through online social media platforms, the

formation of a common culture based on humanitarian values, the possibilities of constituting associations across the boundaries, and organizing social mobilization are structural contributions practiced by activists, organisations, and the aware people that will further form a self-aware public support for human rights in the public sphere.

With the samples of the well-recognized profiles and pages this study reveals that the persons and organisations that thrive in the conventional news media also do well in the social media and gain good support online. Online communication and use of social media provides them to frame better communication strategy to reach the global audience. Curbing the reach and connectedness of social media has not been an easy task for government so during situation of confrontation, bans, and censorship on the traditional channels of communication social media can come on the front and people can be organised speedily and without much obstructions and risk.

Conclusion

Activists and organisations as a promising space for enhancing public support across the regions on human rights issues have recognised social media, but they have to consider the inherent problems of the medium also. Information overload, big data and securing visibility by unknown organisations is a big challenge for people who want to use social media platforms for advocacy on human rights issues. Here, no one can deny the power and potential of social media in the coming days as industry predictions indicate the rising and mainstreaming of online communication. Therefore, in term of human rights protection and sensitisation social media can be used effectively to attain the goals of issue literacy.

With a careful approach concerning issues of freedom of expression and speech and respecting privacy of others such platforms can be established as the forum for human rights sensitisation, awareness, and voice of protest. These social media platforms have power to break the rigid structures of undemocratic practices. With liberating capacities of social media and by exploring their possibilities as multipliers, diffusers, and forum of debating human rights issues a better and participatory democratic environment for promotion and protection of human rights can be created.

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