Journal of Peace, Development and Communication

Article:	**Exploring the Opinion Sharing Patterns among Social Media users in Pakistan**
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Published:	30th Sep 2021
Publisher Information:	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
To Cite this Article:	Huma, Zil e., & Yousaf, Zahid. (2021). "**Exploring** the Opinion Sharing Patterns among Social Media users in Pakistan." *Journal of Peace, Development and Communication*, vol. 05, no. 03, 2021, pp. 42–55, https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I03-04
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Abstract

The spiral of silence theory described that when majority opinion is dominant the minority opinion is not expressed. For the last five decades, the theory of the spiral of silence describes social separation due to minority opinions. The fear of isolation has made individuals frightened in exchanging their opinions. The people who have opinions in minority are the main actors feared from isolation. In today's world, the internet has shown rapid developments in the form of new media, and day by day users are getting attracted to this new technology. This study is an effort to determine the level of effects of the spiral of silence on the young generation of Pakistan. This research focuses on the spiral of silence and the way people are expressing their opinions. This research is quantitative study. A Survey of 1099 respondents has been done through purposive sampling. Opinion sharing is a dependent variable whereas exposure to social media, fear of isolation, willingness to speak, and climate of opinion are independent variables. Regression analysis was applied to check the connection of independent variables with opinion sharing behavior of the social media users. This research uses the spiral of silence theory in relation to the social media usage patterns of its users. The study indicates that the relationship between dependent and independent variables is strong.

Key words: Opinion sharing, fear of isolation, willingness to speak, social media

Introduction

Rise of social media gave new dimensions to the mass communication and media. Communication finds new technological ways to enhance its reach and boundaries. Social media makes the process of communication i.e transfer of text, photos, audio, video, and all kind of information very efficient, quick and cast effective(Baruah, 2012). Traditional media did not allow interaction and sharing of information with such flexibility as provided by social media. There are several social networking websites like twitter, Facebook, and Linkedin where online communities can share and interact virtually (Manno & Shahrabi, 2010). This interaction led to the free flow and sharing of information as there is no such phenomenon like gate keeping etc hence relatively huge amount of information travelled on social media as compared to traditional media. According to Joosten (2012) Social media is a platform where anybody can people share anything. (p.14)

In this scenario traditional communication methods and models are now seemed to be replaced and revisited in accordance with the emergence of new media. Social media empower the people by converting their role from just audience to active participant as the social media carried majority of the opinions and posts from people which were previously considered as mere audience (Luoma-Aho, 2010). Social media creates a new environment hence many theories of mass communication and public relations are becoming outdated (Luoma-Aho, 2010). The spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) explains that people will only speak when their opinion is in majority otherwise they will stay silent. Peoples fear of isolation never them speak in public. People monitor their social environment closely especially mas media. Mass media has a significant effect on sharing of opinion among public and this is the first part of spiral of silence theory. Climate of opinion perception and peoples fear about their opinion and its perception amongst others is the second part of spiral of silence theory. Majority opinions are always appreciated in social set up and minority opinion is not expressed in public. This could eventually lead toward misleading opinions and reality as majority opinion gains ground while minority opinion loses grounds.

Experiments conducted by Milgram (1963) and Asch (1951) provided stimulus for Noelle-Neumann's research about conformity. A historical basis for Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence is her research on public opinion study which was initially conducted in the context of German political elections, and replicated frequently in subsequent studies by both Noelle-Neumann and other researchers. Individual's views about their social environment got strongly influenced by the mass media. This theory holds that there is a positive relationship between the public's perception about an issue's importance and the amount of media coverage (Luoma-Aho, 2010).

Spiral of silence theory assume that individual scan and interpret social environment and assess the climate of opinion. Noelle-Neumann (1974), posits that the people have a "quasi-statistical sense" that allows individuals to scan climate of opinion, done by analyzing mass media, which they utilize to assess about their own positions in society. Due to fear of being isolated from the majority, individuals will refrain from publicly expressing their opinions when their own position is projected to be in the minority. People will choose to remain quiet if they perceive that their views are not as acceptable in society as opinion of majority and are considered as the view of the minority as they fear isolation from the majority(Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Mass media is an important tool of information and had a great influence on what people perceive as reality and serve majority opinion (Porten-Cheé & Eilders, 2015). Minority opinions will continue to become

less and less until there is only one discourse being covered and promoted by the mass media (Drake, 2008).

Objectives

1. To study the role of social media usage in connection with fear of isolation.

2. To investigate the relationship of social media usage and climate of opinion.

3. To measure the role of social media usage in enhancing willingness to speak out of Pakistani youth.

Hypothesis

H1: Incompatibility in individuals perceived opinion climate discourage their will to speak on social media.

H2: Fear of isolation in individuals prevents to share their opinion on social media.

H3: Individual willingness to speak up is the reason to stay silent on social media.

Statement of the Problem

Rise of social media put new challenges[1] for traditional[2] mass communication theories. The present study explores the emergence of social media in Pakistan as a platform of opinion sharing. It is an effort to testify the presence of spiral of silence effect in social media by measuring different variable associated with the theory like exposure to media, climate [3]of opinion, fear of isolation and willingness to speak.

Literature Review

Literature review is the basic step for understanding theoretical, as well as methodological considerations for any research study. It involves systematic study of relevant studies about the topic under investigation. Researcher uses different online and offline sources to find relevant literature about the topic. Various studies have shown a correlation between perceived climate of opinion and Individual's willingness to speak out. Glynn et al. (1997) and Shanahan et al. (2007) found a statistically significant and positive relationship between personal perception of being in the majority and willingness to speak out in a meta-analysis they conducted. When people perceive their opinions as majority are tend to be majority in future they share and express their convictions within their social circle of family and friends (Jeffres, Neuendorf, & Atkin, 1999). However, people hide their opinion if they feel their views as minority and deviant from the prevailing opinion in society due to fear of isolation(Moy, Domke, & Stamm, 2001), which results in creation of a spiral, in which individuals who perceives themselves as deviant from the prevailing climate of opinion fall silent. The base of the spiral of silence theory lies on the idea about perception of the public opinion and its relationship with willingness to discuss and share an opinion.

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[1] Challenges is defined by researcher as " competitive situation of new media in tem of ability and strength"
[2] Traditional is defined by researcher as "long established theories of mass communication"
[3] Climate is defined as prevailing trend of public opinion

Spiral of silence theory's application is subject to new conditions, which are textured by the modern undercurrents of the cyberspace, which has a totally different climate of opinion sharing than traditional media. And these new models and conditions have the prospective to surge people's inclination to share their opinion (Liu & Fahmy, 2011). Social media's rise redefine all the characteristics of mass media in online context especially consonance as individual got more control over expression of opinion hence the social media communication is a self as well as mass communication hence called mass self-communication (Castells, 2013).

Schulz and Roessler (2012)'s more recent research about online climate of opinion highlights that individual process information from social media or cyberspace by 'subjective–pluralistic pattern'. Wanta and Dimitrova (2000) studied the dynamics of online chat rooms, and the work of Woong Yun and Park (2011) provided a major influence to obscurity of social media user. Scholars also presented comparison of online and offline applications. Oh (2011)'s study examined the correlation between willingness of individuals to speak out in virtual and offline communication and the spiral of silence and fail to fully confirm the main hypotheses in the spiral of silence. Ho and McLeod (2008) found no evidence for spiral of silence on social media as well as while Liu and Fahmy (2011) found the presence of silencing effect in face-to-face settings, but did not in cyberspace. Kwon, Moon, and Stefanone (2015) also got similar kind of findings about the absence of spiral of silence in the online settings.

Dean (2012) argues that the Internet in the context of unrestrained capitalism become a technological charm that modernized post-politics which is called the emergence of a political private sphere by Papacharissi (2010). Cyberspace and social networking websites is one of the most popular arenas for political and public discussion. Rise of social media has resulted in public discussions on the implications of these media for the political realm. There is both optimistic as well as more skeptical school of thoughts regarding political expression on social media.

Aaron Smith (2009) explained that 74% Americans has involved in 2008 election through social media as the participated in online discussion through modern technology and break the chain of silence. This ration is far better than the participants of discussions on internet in 2000 American elections. Almost one-third of the 2008 Internet users said they shared opinions about the election in particular and the political process in general. They did so by posting comments, watching policy videos, volunteering in election campaigns and other related activities. The debate about whether the Internet can encourage political discourse has entered a new phase with the rapid spread of social media (Michaelsen, 2011). Every tenth user of internet (10%) reportedly used the Internet for political reasons with the help of social networking websites where they may find the political interest and affiliation of their friends (A Smith & Rainie, 2008, p. 11). According to Lenhart (2009), in election of 2008, 41% of those who used social networking sites discovered about candidate whom their friends voted for while 33% posted political content for their friends and 26% revealed about their vote for presidential candidate.

We draw an image from the literature which predicts that there are certain challenges being faced by the spiral of silence and some key features of the theory are undergone a wave of new conditions in wake of the dynamics of the cyberspace's special characteristics (Chen, 2011). Anonymity, a special feature of cyberspace, strongly changes the concept willingness to speak out as when the people are anonymous there is a greater tendency of speaking and the tendency to conform with the views of others reduced considerably (Mutz, 2002). When people are anonymous on social

media and cyberspace then there should be less degree of fear of isolation hence computer-mediated discussions led to the expression by challenging this feature of the spiral of silence theory (Ho & McLeod, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

This study has explored the phenomenon of spiral of silence in connection with online environment, especially with reference to the social networking websites and political participation of users on various political issues. In the 1970s, Noelle-Neumann formed a theory which explained that formations of public opinion (Glynn, 1997:452) results from people's perception of opinion (Yun & Park, 2011: 202). People use a statistical tools to regulate whether their opinions are appreciated or not (Hayes,2007:785). If their opinion is in majority they will tend to speak and if their opinion is not appreciated in a majority then they will stay silent (Liu & Fahmy, 2011:46). The focus of the study is to analyze the spiraling effect on social media and how social media is providing alternative platform for expression of opinion in contrast with traditional mass media platforms.

Methodology

This study is quantitative in its nature; Survey has been employed as a research method to explore the spiral of silence and opinion sharing on social media. Population of study is the social media users of Pakistan having age 20 to 35. Purposive Sampling technique is used and 1099 respondents were selected from four provinces i.e. 250 from each province and 99 respondents from capital territory Islamabad. Questionnaire is designed to collect the responses from the sample size. Scales for social media exposure, fear of isolation, climate of opinion, willingness to speak out has been designed to testify the spiral of silence theory in social media usage. Questions have been designed according to following measures.

Findings and analysis

Linear regression is used to model the value of a dependent scale variable based on its linear relationship to one or more predictors. Regression is a statistical measure used in finance, investing and other disciplines that attempts to determine the strength of the relationship between one dependent variable (usually denoted by Y) and a series of other changing variables (known as independent variables). This research has found strong association amongst hypothesizes developed in this research. The hypothesis of the research has been approved with Strong relations. The results of regression analysis indicate that independent and dependent variables are associated with each other strongly.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.700[a]	.490	.488	.74861

a. Predictors: (Constant), Willingness_to_Speak, Climate_of_Opinion, Social_media_exposure, Fear_of_Isolation

b. Dependent Variable: Opinion_sharing

The table represents the model Summary. In this table value of "R" is Correlation Coefficient which describes the strength of relationship as well as the direction. Here the value of R is 0.700 which is positive. It indicates that the relationship between dependent and independent variables is strong and positive. The value of R square represents the coefficient of determination. It indicates that model is fit.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	587.932	4	146.983	262.274	.000[b]
	Residual	613.096	1094	.560		
	Total	1201.028	1098			

a. Dependent Variable: Opinion_sharing

b. Predictors: (Constant), Willingness_to_Speak, Climate_of_Opinion, Social_media_exposure, Fear_of_Isolation

The table represents the results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), it describes about goodness of model fit. Significant value is less than 0.05 it indicates that model is good fitted.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.994	.177		11.278	.000
	Social_media_exposure	.136	.049	.067	2.778	.006
	Fear_of_Isolation	.221	.060	.090	3.688	.000

Climate_of_Opinion	.889	.046	.459	19.217	.000
Willingness_to_Speak	.808	.057	.382	14.231	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Opinion_sharing

The table represents the results of Regression coefficients. Significant level for all independent variables is less than prob. Level which shows that these variables have significant effect of Social Media Usage. The value of regression coefficient for all variables is positive which indicate direct relation.
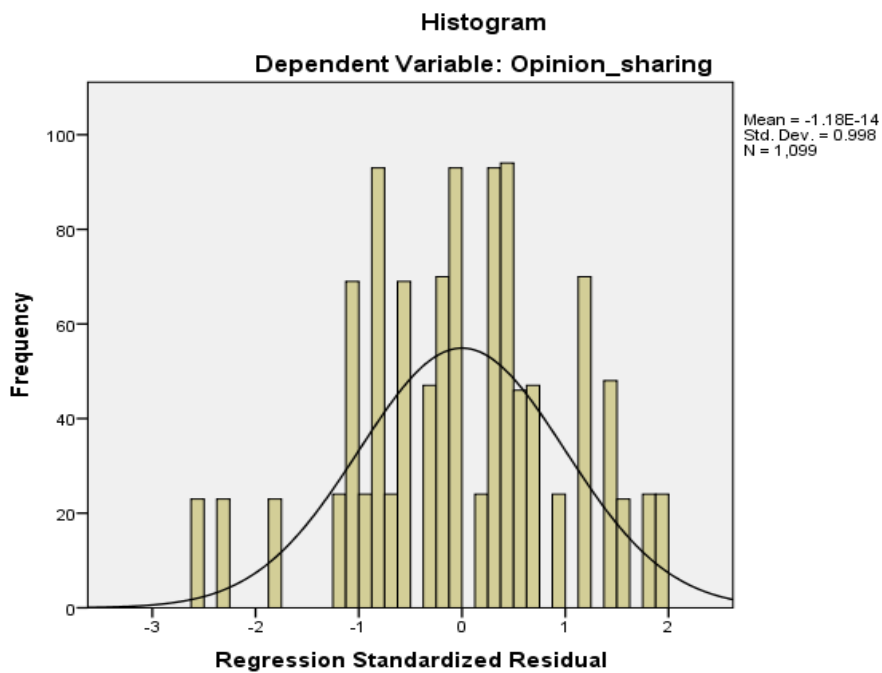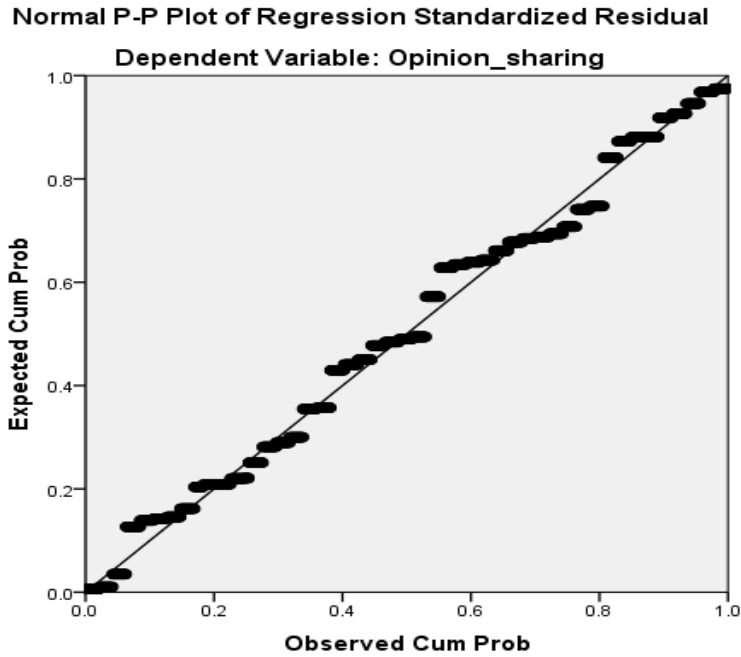

Histogram
Dependent Variable: Opinion_sharing

Mean = -1.18E-14
Std. Dev. = 0.998
N = 1,099

Figure represents the histogram. The plot is drawn to check the assumption of Normality for regression Analysis.

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Opinion_sharing

The Figure represents Normal Probability plot, used to check the assumptions of Regression model.

Scatterplot
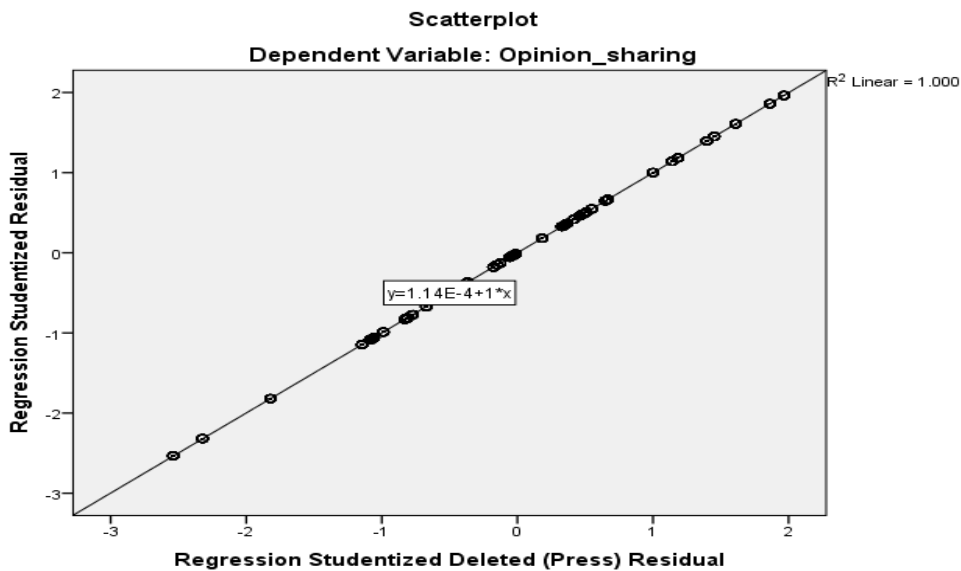Dependent Variable: Opinion_sharing

Figure represents scatter plot along with regression line which indicates the positive and upward slope of regression line.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has found strong relationship amongst hypothesizes developed in this research. The hypotheses of the research have been approved with significance. The results of regression analysis indicate that independent and dependent variables are associated with each other strongly. Fear of isolation in use of social media is an important social aspect of current research. In this research, researcher has focused on the variables which are affecting people to stop sharing anything on social media (Facebook and twitter) because those acts could lead people toward less contact or being hated by the people or group of people. Individuals are made of community feeling. People cannot live with society and social support on so many issues. First hypothesis was incompatibility between individuals personal and perceived opinion climate discourage their will to speak on social media. Hypothesis is approved (beta value = .67). Second hypothesis was fear of isolation in individuals prevents to share their opinion on social media. An average impact is explained through data (Beta value= .090). Third hypothesis was individual willingness to speak up is the reason to stay silent on social media. This hypotheses is approved (beta value = .459). Fourth hypothesis was obtrusiveness towards issue make individual speaks out in public on social media (beta value = .382).

The study has found that Social pressure, conflict situations, minority issues and controversial issues are the cause for being silent. These variables in term of content have the tendency to effect social contacts and let individual stay contrary from societal thoughts and eventually, in a state of isolation. It was assumed in the study that people intentionally try to avoid a state of fear of isolation by avoiding and not sharing ideas which are irrelevant or in contrast with rest of the members of society or from the people who have opinions in majority. This assumption has been proved correct with the regression analysis results. The table of regression analysis represented the model Summary. In that table value of "R" is Correlation Coefficient which describes the strength of relationship as well as the direction. The value of R is 0.700 which is showing significance of the data. It indicates that the relationship between dependent and independent variables is strong and positive. The value of R square also represents the coefficient of determination. The hypothesis related to fear of isolation is also proved true with beta value .090.

It has been found that fear of social isolation is causing feelings of loneliness, negative esteem, fear of isolation and lake of constant contact with friends. These are the variables which are the reason for not sharing thoughts, ideas and opinions on any given issue on social media. Mood is found to be an intervening variable which is also affecting the opinion sharing habits. There are depressive moods which hold humans silent. Spiral of silent makes us believe that media users are silent if they have fear of isolation. They estimate the situation and then speak up on any given issue. There is another factor which is willingness to speak up. It depends that if the respondent is willing to response. Sometimes, it is not the fear of isolation that let individuals stay quiet of speaks up or other factors which are mentioned but a self-driven force to stay on a specific opinion and with constant behavior. It is found that self-censorship is identifying element in political communication. Public agency has strong effects on issue under study. When a situation is met where one's opinion are in minority, people hold self-censorship and reserve their opinion rather to stay quiet or leaned toward majority opinion. Regression is applied to test the relationship of variables (Dubois, 2018).

Developing intimate relations on social media is a driven force for its users. It is also an inner force for maintaining relationships with their peer groups. There are many social variables to connect people which stops social media users to express their opinions and conforms their silencing attitude toward any issue being discussed on social media. The study indicated that social media users are having preventive nature and the effects of being staying in self-defining. Thus, they are not having interactions with social groups. It has been found through this research that people's isolation and not having interactive relations with people on social media is due to their poorer cognition, declined cognition, depressive cognition, social threats sensitivity, self-protectiveness and confirmatory biases as well Noelle-Neumann's (1974) concept has been studied widely and applied to a variety of communication situations, mostly using hypothetical scenarios and face-to-face interactions. The present research has applied the Spiral of Silence concept to

political opinion expression on the social networking websites in context of Pakistan. Because access to the Internet is easy, the users of the Internet are increasing Jiang, Hsu, Klein, and Lin (2000). Rise of social networking sites provides alternative channels for opinion expression which was previously very limited and controlled by mass media (Eke & Odoh, 2014). Individual get more power and control over media through social networking websites. Spiral of silence theory was originally formulated in context of traditional media hence rise of social media brought severe criticisms in relation with the cyberspace. Noelle-Neumann claims media has a major influence on individuals and majority opinion (Neuwirth, 2000), their perception about social reality and climate of opinion assessed by their quasi-statistical sense.

It is found in this study that fear of isolation causes social media users to stay silent and not sharing their opinions on social media. There fear is about political happening, social issue and confliction issues. The following research has focused on social media users to comment, share, like and make a tree for effecting society. The fear of isolation stops social change and deny the process of change. (All voices cannot be heard). This study has indicated through quantitative data that many people are silent on social media due to fear of isolation. Fear of isolation also effected people's willingness to speak. People are reluctant on their ideas and feared to share anything. There are many political events where some people silent because they think majority would reject their idea and so they will have weak ties with them. There is a cultural relevance to the fear of isolation as well. People are silent because they are on any irrelevant cultural social group. Fear of isolation is a driven social force for the silent behavior of social media users. Agreeable context is the force to share opinions on social media (Gearhart et al., 2015).

The study reveals that staying consistent with any group on social media is the powerful force to stay silent and not sharing opinions while using social media. Public opinion means to say something freely, without any kind of fear of isolation. People are afraid of sanctions which could be done with the individual if they have deviant opinion. This research has been done to measure fear of isolation and public willingness to speak. The fear of isolation leads public to not to express their opinion in online settings and express it in an offline situation. This attitude of individuals is due to their fear of rejection and eventually for being in isolation due to deviant behaviors (Johnson et al., 2001).

There are many factors described by researcher and checked through quantifiable date about patterns of public behave in a certain climate of opinion. These measures are the anti-Political environment, majority opinion. This part of the study found that opinion sharing is subject to having a look onto the outer environment. It is found that opinion sharing and opinion expression is the probability of individual. Climate of opinion is closely related to willingness to speak up. People convict or support any specific opinion to overturn an environment of free expression.

This research has discussed in this study that uncanny nature of the individuals helps them to stay in an easy mode without any retaliation. The current research has studied the elements relevant to climate of opinion and found significant association (beta value = .382).of the climate of the opinion with opinion sharing behaviors of the social media users. Opinion sharing is affecting the content coming through new media (Facebook and twitter). Opinion sharing is dependent on individual's willingness to speak, if they wish to share something or not. Further, it is dependent on climate of opinion. Opinion sharing is dependent on individual's analyses of their outer environment. Fear of isolation is also dependent upon sharing opinion on new media. It is proved in this research that Incompatibility in individuals perceived opinion climate discourage their will to speak on social media; Fear of isolation in individuals prevents to share their opinion on social media; Obtrusiveness towards issue make individual speaks out in public on social media and Individual willingness to speak up is the reason to stay silent on social media. Theory of spiral of silence is equally beneficial in study of online line media along with its application on traditional media.

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