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Article:	Power of Social Networking Sites in Bringing Social Change on the part of Youth through Digital Activism
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Abstract

The study attempts to explain the role of social networking sites in bringing social change through youth. The study used cause and effect research design in order to determine how social networking sites are affecting the trend of social protests. Data was collected from different professions, occupations and educational institutions of Punjab, Pakistan, through a well-developed questionnaire. To conduct the study, a sample size of 300 respondents was chosen to get accurate findings. Convenience sampling was used where the respondents were selected according to their availability and ease from a sample size of 300 respondents was selected. The findings of the study revealed that social networking sites are playing a significant role in bringing social change in a society, especially through youth, ranging from 21 to 25 years of age. Males are showing greater support to these protests. Moreover, governments do not get much involved in issues through social media; rather they try to use traditional means of involvement. It was also concluded that people who believe that protesting through social media is non-violent, show greater support in favor of it.

Keywords: Digital Activism through Public Relations, Digital Networking Theory, Social Networking Sites, Role of Youth in Social Change, Online Protests, Revolution through Social Media

Introduction

The prominent feature of social networking site is that it is playing a significant role in promoting social awareness. It has provided a platform to bridge up people residing at distant places in order to interact socially. Apart from this, it has also linked people on issues of politics, economics and culture and others. But in recent times, a new change has been seen regarding the functioning of the social networking sites where it offers a narrative structure, thus providing alternative voices and in depth information. Complex relations have been seen between media and protest groups (Harlow & Johnson, 2011).

Mostly the citizens of Arab Spring, including countries like Egypt, Tunisia and others, became digital activist through the social media networking sites. In case of Egypt, many researchers like Moussa emphasized that the revolution in Egypt which started through the social networking sites, also became viral on micro-blogging and mainstream media (Moussa, 2013). He further argued that people used these tools to ask for justice and freedom. In his research he highlighted that during protest paradigm, selection of medium is highly important as it plays a vital role in shaping people protest, their attitudes and their words (Moussa, 2013).

Therefore, numerous studies have been conducted in countries where revolutions are brought as a result of social movements through social and digital media. Qaisar and Riaz (2020) established that there is strong relationship between social media and traditional media on political issues. In such countries, youth played a pivotal role in connecting the citizens together in order to support a cause. Few events also took place in Pakistan, which were more highlighted by the social networking sites as compared to the mainstream media, but no studies were done to get a thorough understanding of them. Thus, it is imperative to undertake a research in order to study that, in the light of few incidents in the Pakistan, is the youth adopting a new platform for it to have a say, and secondly, at to what extent social media is helping the citizens to get acceptance of their demands, which are being called out through the social networking sites. Therefore, the study aims to find out that whether social networking sites are playing a significant role in bringing social change or not. Moreover, it is to investigate that whether the pakistani youth is moving from the old traditional means of protest to the digital activism, mainly through social media. Lastly, it intends to find out that to what extent the youth is using social networking sites for the purpose of social movements and get their demands accepted by the government

Literature Review

Social networking sites

Social networking sites are defined as the websites which allow the users to make profile, search friends and interact with them (Kazaeniak, 2009) These networking sites fall under the social media, a subset of Information and Communication Technologies, providing online tools to users, which enable them to gather information and collaborate with them, while participating (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2008). Moreover, people use these sites in different ways to collect information, do discussions, create and view advertisements and upload pictures (Prasad, 2014).

Facebook

Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and was marked as the highest networking site of social media. It allows the users to make their own profile and use it to add friends, update status, photos and videos. This platform helps to update the newsfeed of the users which informs their friends regarding the current action, moods or upcoming events (Wikipedia, 2011a).

Twitter

Twitter was launched in 2006 as free social networking site. It provides its users various services to make a chain of contacts and interact with them by sending and receiving

tweets. Users can even stop receiving newsfeed of their specific contact ([Wikipedia, 2011b](#)). In recent times, Twitter has been regarded as the ‘real time social networking’ as it does not provide a static environment for blogging but a platform producing news that is dynamic in nature ([Deller, 2011](#)).

YouTube

YouTube is also one of popular websites, which was launched in 2005. It allows users to share videos with the users among which the unregistered users can only view the video where as registered ones have the authority to upload the videos as well ([Wikipedia, 2011c](#)). It has paved way to serve people who belong to various fields including academic ends ([Snelson, 2011](#)).

Digital activism

The new media have led groups of people to think about how social, political and cultural aspects of society which could be discussed on this platform ([Goodling, 2015](#)). The researcher argues that it can be seen that the use of new media especially social media, is mostly used by the new generation and as a result of it, a generational divide is created that has given more power to the young ones to engage in online activities. Other researchers believe that the divide is created on the basis of participation where the elite and well educated class leads the lower class, in terms of their role in social media ([Rotman et al., 2011](#)). Moreover, they highlight that the use of social media, technologies and communication tools have played a significant role in managing the crisis. Digital activism has not only changed the business trends, consumer behaviors and lifestyles ([Goodling, 2009](#)) but has also mobilized people of different states to raise voice for social change and bring in democracy ([P Seib, 2007](#)).

Youth

In countries like Egypt, youth was regarded the major cause in awakening the people of the country. According to a researcher, the youth of Egypt was regarded as a problem when it took over the streets, but later, the problem transformed to the hope of the country ([Sharnouby, 2012](#)). The researcher also added that the upper-middle class man especially males, were labeled as the ‘new young’ who could change the country. It was recorded that the Egypt marked the largest street protest of youth which aged fewer than 30 ([Gerhart, 2013](#)). The researcher further pointed out that the youth which actively participated in the protest either directly or indirectly, was considered as the youth to bring about the social change. Furthermore, it was also noted that among the youth, women played a central role in raising voice for their rights and participated actively throughout the revolution, thus showing indifference from males ([Morrow & al-Omrani, 2012](#)). However, it was seen that the Tunisian Revolution triggered the Egyptians to bring out social movement ([Hauslohner, 2011](#)). It was noted that people in Tunisia considered the society as patriarchal, where the decision-making power laid with the authorities, but with the passage of time, the situations got worse to such an extent that this rule was broken down and resultantly, the youth was compelled to step forward ([Gerhart, 2013](#)).

Social change through social networking sites around the world

The social media was much speedily and easily accepted in the Arab spring than the electronic or print media. It played a significant role in ending up autocratic rule ([Storck, 2011](#)). The main events or revolutions which were caused as a result of social media activities are the revolution in Iran in 2009, which can also be called ‘Twitter Revolution’, and the revolution in Egypt in 2011 which can also be called ‘Facebook Revolution’ ([Bailly, 2012](#)).

In case of Iran, the Green Movement of 1979 played a pivotal role in bringing about revolution in Iran ([Moghanizadeh, 2013](#)). Not only this, but it also paved way towards the fall of regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. Next to this, the social networking sites further aggravated the social protests and movements ([Moghanizadeh, 2013](#)). These sites helped to spread the

message of the Iranians in order to bring in the revolution against the unfair elections which highlighted the victory of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad (Bailly, 2012).

The revolution in Tunisia began as a result of Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolation which initiated the use of social media across the country (Mahmoud, 2015). The researcher further recorded that a facebook user was seen to have uploaded the first video which used words like ‘Takriz’ meaning ‘fed up’. This video was followed by a bombardment of videos of other social networking sites.

Social change through social networking sites in Pakistan

The Arab Spring revolution led other countries of the world to adopt the wireless means i.e. social networking sites to raise their voices to some extent. In Pakistan, the use of social networking sites, especially Facebook, followed by Twitter, was seen during different events such as Salman Taseer’s assassination, election vote rigging, Army Public School Attack and other events. Even in recent times, Mumtaz Qadri’s issue did not get much coverage on electronic media but it became viral on Facebook. Apart from this, youth was seen in raising its voice against terrorism and joining its hands to crush it down. Pakistan Youth Alliance page on Facebook was seen to show unity against terrorism and extremism (Error! Reference source not found..1).



Moreover, Shahzeb Murder Case also captured a large number of youth which showed its support in his favor. The protest through social media was aimed to grab the high authorities and news. Figure 1.2 Justice for Shahzeb Khan is successful in spreading its message across the country through a fast and non-violent medium (Atif, 2013). The following figure shows that Facebook was used to plan and execute protest for bringing in social change and asking for justice. This was carried out through a page In The Memory Of Shahzaib Khan (Error! Reference source not found.).

This shows that the coverage trend of issues is changing. Therefore, the purpose of the study is get a clear view of the performance of youth in bringing social change through social networking sites.

Rationale

The reason behind the selection of this topic is that social media is playing a significant role in bringing revolution and change around the world. Utilization of traditional means is of no use in this era of digitalization. Moreover, people do not even get access to media outlets in order to get their voices across the world. Online platforms, especially the social networking sites have provided an access to people to raise their voices for change, development and justice in the society. The use of social networking sites is tremendously being used by the outer world. Keeping in view the scenario of Pakistan, people are switching to online modes of getting their words recorded. Therefore, this study will add a new aspects to already existing researches as the undertaken study has not been conducted in Pakistan, especially covering multi-dimensional areas.

Objectives

1. To assess the overall effect of social networking sites in bringing social change on the part of youth through digital activism
2. To find out whether demographic characteristics such as gender and age influence in bringing social change through digital activism
3. To monitor the role of government in any social protest
4. To find out the differences in support to online protests, of those who think online protests are non-violent and those who think traditional means of protests are violent
5. To check the effectiveness of social networking sites in supporting protests, as compared to traditional media.
6. To monitor the trend of protests according to what each gender believes

Research Questions

RQ1: Which gender supports the online social protests at a greater extent?

RQ2: Which set of youth is highly digitally active?

RQ3: Do social networking sites play a significant role in involving government on any social protest?

RQ4: Are those who think online protests are non-violent and those who think traditional means of protests are violent, show any difference in their support to online protests?

RQ5: Are social networking sites an effective way to support a protest as compared to that through traditional media?

RQ6: Which gender believes that the trend of protests changing in Pakistan?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Males support online social protests more than females.

Hypothesis 2: The youth lying between age 21 to 25 is highly digitally active when online protests are concerned.

Hypothesis 3: Social networking sites play a significant role in involving government on most of the social protest.

Hypothesis 4: Those who believe that the online protests are non-violent and those who believe that the traditional protests are violent, show equal support to online protests.

Hypothesis 5: Social networking sites are an effective way to support a protest as compared to that through traditional media.

Hypothesis 6: Males show greater agreement to the fact that the trend of protests is moving from traditional to online.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Network Theory seems to be relevant to the study. The theory basically talks about how within a social network, people tend to develop connections, build trust, value and transfer knowledge to one another. In addition to this, Public Relations as Activism (Holtzhausen, 2012), also elaborates the role of public relations in bringing change in society, by applying postmodernism. Keeping in view the undertaken research, the study aims to

focus on social networks which are used by people in order to bring social change in society. It is through social media platforms that initiate people to raise their voices and exchange their views on causes like peace, justice or freedom by changing the trend to being activated.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to find that whether the social networking sites are activating the youth to use these sites in order to bring social change, and at what rate this trend is being adopted as compared to previous ways. Therefore, cause and effect research design was applied to gain insight to the problem situation. Considering the population of the undertaken study as the youth of Punjab, Pakistan, a sample of 300 people was drawn using the non-probability technique of sampling. The technique included quota sampling by reserving 150 respondents for each gender. It was followed by convenience sampling where those respondents were drawn who were conveniently available to participate in the study. The respondents were surveyed on an individual level but a cumulative analysis was carried out to study the youth as a whole. The unit of analysis was youth, ranging from 15 years of age to 30 years. It included respondents from variety of professions, occupations and educational backgrounds. A well-designed questionnaire was developed and vetted by a senior professor. A pilot study was conducted to check and implement if any necessary amendments were needed. After a few changes, the study was conducted in the field. On the collection of data, the responses were analysed using data analysis tools like Chi-square Test, Independent T-test, ANOVA, Descriptive Statistics and Frequency Determination. The analysis helped to get answers to the research questions and to check that whether the hypotheses are rejected or not. Following are the research questions and hypotheses:

Data Analysis And Interpretation

The data acquired from the questionnaire was analyzed in variety of ways. Cronbach’s Alpha was used to check the reliability of the instrument. The following figure denotes that the value of Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.848 which means that the scale is 84% reliable.

Figure 1.1 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.848	19

Chi-square was applied to find out that which age category, of each gender, dominated the study. The following cross-tabulation table shows that the youth ranging from 21 years of age to 25 years was in majority, which included 107 males and 91 females out of 150 respondents each.

Figure 1.2 Gender * Age-Cross Tabulation

Gender * Age Cross-tabulation

Count

		Age			Total
		15-20	21-25	26-30	
Gender	Male	29	107	14	150
	Female	37	91	22	150
Total		66	198	36	300

T

The data also gives an overview of what the respondents think about different factors of protests through social networking sites. The factors were measured through frequency determination which denoted that what majority of the respondents believed. The following table elaborates the responses of the youth in this regard.

Figure 1.3 Factors of Social Networking Sites * Responses

Factors of Social Networking Sites	Responses
Safe	Agree
Economical	Agree
Accessible	Agree
Not time bounded	Agree

The study was based to investigate answers to the research questions. The following analysis shows that whether the hypotheses were rejected or not.

Hypothesis 1: Males support online social protests more than females.

Figure 1.4 Group Statistics * Supporting Online Protests

Group Statistics

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
You support an online social protest Male	150	2.3133	.89094	.07275
Female	150	2.4667	1.15664	.09444

T-test was applied to check the difference in mean of the two genders. The data depicts that male tend to support the online social protests more than females do. Therefore, we do not reject the above hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The youth lying between age 21 to 25 is highly digitally active when online protests are concerned.

Figure 1.5 Multiple Comparisons

The table illustrates that respondents ranging from age 21 to 25 agree to the fact that

Multiple Comparisons

You have become digitally active to raise your voice for truth and justice

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
15-20	21-25	-.24747	.14326	.085
	26-30	-.11616	.20884	.578
21-25	15-20	.24747	.14326	.085
	26-30	.13131	.18262	.473
26-30	15-20	.11616	.20884	.578
	21-25	-.13131	.18262	.473

They are more digitally active than those ranging from 15 to 20 years. This is confirmed by the application of ANOVA which shows their strong relation to online protests. Thus, on this basis, the hypothesis is not rejected and it is concluded that the youth lying between age 21 to 25 is highly digitally active when online protests are concerned.

Hypothesis 3: Social networking sites play a significant role in involving government on most of the social protest.

Figure 1.6 Government’s Role * Mean

Government’s role	Mean
Reach	2.5833
Awareness	2.5833
Response	2.6900
Convince	2.8100

It is clear from the above data that the respondents show an overall neutral response regarding government’s involvement in social networking sites. The statistics depict that social networking sites are not much successful in reaching, awaring, responding and convincing the government. Thus, on such basis, the above hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 4: Those who believe that the online protests are non-violent and those who believe that the traditional protests are violent, show equal support to online protests.

Figure 1.7 Agreements of Respondents

Respondents who agree to support online protests	119/300
Respondents who agree that online protests are non-violent	103/300
Respondents who agree that traditional protests are violent	97/300

Chi-square was applied to analyse the results for the above mentioned hypothesis. The table describes that 119 respondents show their support for online protests with full agreement. The respondent who agree that online social protests are non-violent show greater support to those who agree that the traditional means are violent. Therefore, on such basis, the hypothesis is rejected as both do not show equal support to online social protests.

Hypothesis 5: Social networking sites are an effective way to support a protest as compared to that through traditional media.

Figure 1.7 Social Networking Sites * Support Online Protests

Social networking sites support protests which are not otherwise, covered by other media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	67	22.3	22.3	22.3
Agree	123	41.0	41.0	63.3
Neutral	76	25.3	25.3	88.7
Disagree	30	10.0	10.0	98.7
Strongly Disagree	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

It is clear from the above mentioned frequency table that majority of the respondents agree that social networking sites support protests, which are not otherwise covered by the traditional media. 41% show their agreement while 25% remain neutral on the coverage of an issue in this regard. Thus, social networking sites are an effective way of supporting a protest than any other medium and therefore, the hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis 6: Males show greater agreement to the fact that the trend of protests is moving from traditional to online.

Figure 1.7 Group Statistics * Trend of Social Protests

Group Statistics

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The trend of social Male	150	2.5400	1.19636	.09768
protests is changing in Female	150	2.3733	.89403	.07300
Pakistan				

The T-test gives a clear view that there is significant difference between male and female’s belief regarding the changing trend of social protests. However, the mean shows that females show greater agreement to the fact that the trend of social protests is moving from old traditional means to new online means of protest, as compared to males. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected, with the fact that females agree that the trend is changing.

Discussion, Commentary And Conclusion

The instrument was designed to gather the relevant data and get answers of the research questions. Six research questions were developed that helped in finding solutions to the problems. However, in response to the first research question i.e. which gender supports the online social protests at a greater extent. The findings outlined that males showed more support to online social protests than females. Though, the previous finding explained that women played a central role in bringing revolutions through protests, especially in Egypt (Morrow & al-Omrani, 2012), but the middle-class men of Egypt also turned out to be the 'new young' who showed their support for online protests (Sharnouby, 2012). Next to this, the data was also used to investigate that which set of youth was highly digitally active. On analysis of the data, it was clear that the youth lying between 21 years of age to 25 was highly digitally active where as the studies conducted in the past emphasized that the youth underlying the age of 30 played a pivotal role in making protests successful (Gerhart, 2013).

The study was also focused on finding that did social networking sites play a significant role in involving government on any social protest or not. The finding deduced that social networking sites did not compel the government to get involved in an issue to greater extent. The traditional media held a strong hand over government's attraction towards a problem while in the studies of past, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and others, helped in bringing revolution in countries like Iran, against unfair victory of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in elections (Bailly, 2012). The research also focused on whether the youth which think online protests are non-violent and that which think traditional means of protests are violent, showed any difference in their support to online protests. The findings concluded that those who think online protests are violent showed greater agreement in their support as compared to other one and thus, they did not show equal support. The literature review also proved that the non-violent and fast nature of social networking sites helped in taking the message to a large number of audience (Atif, 2013).

The study was also aimed at finding that whether social networking sites an effective way to support a protest as compared to that through traditional media or not. The results ensured that social networking sites were an effective and strong way of protesting against an issue. Similarly, the background studies also emphasized on the importance of social networking sites that they helped in managing crisis (Rotman et al., 2011). Moreover, it also checked that whether the trend was changing or not, in regard to the support of male and female. The statistics of the current study showed that females showed their greater agreement towards the change in trend rather than the males. The previous writings also showed that females were the central key in bringing a change in the trend of social protests (Morrow & al-Omrani, 2012).

The undertaken study concludes that the trend of social protests is changing with the passage of time. The main reason behind the adoption of this new trend is the active part of youth as a result of which the youth has become digitally active through social networking sites. The youth believes that the social media is a safe, non-violent and effective way to raise voice for truth and justice. Though, it is considered a strong medium in carrying out social protests, but it is not much successful in involving government in social issue, especially in Pakistan. Therefore, on basis of such findings, it is suggested that the Pakistani youth must use social networking sites for raising its voice against the harsh realities of societies and making government aware of them. Even, the sites could also be used in bringing revolution in country if one feels that the current ruler of the state is making wrong use of his power. Thus, it could be only possible if the youth firmly stands together and show unity as done by those in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other countries. However, due to limitation of time and location, it was unable to gather data from a large number of youth in the country. Therefore, a small sample was selected and results were applied as a whole.

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