

SOCIAL SITES' CONSUMPTION PATTERN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN INDIAN & GAMBIAN YOUTHS

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Abstract

Digital Social Sites have proved their-selves as a podium for youth, worldwide. Mighty Political systems of various countries have been challenged or over thrown by this very media. But paradox is prevailing too. The same media is being blamed to have indecent of irresponsible content. Attempts to have a check on them are being made in various countries including biggest democracy of the world -India. Monitoring system has already begun in various cities of India. Various questions come forth. Would so called 'more disciplined' social media attract more users? Or it could create the barriers in the procession of social sites. Where the future of digital social media lies? To study this, Researchers have made a comparative study between India and Gambia: A Developing Democratic African country, which is having comparative harsher control over digital social media. As per the requirement of topic, researchers used focus group studies involving equal numbers of Gambian and Indian Students. The research indicates that even a minor check on social media puts psychological barrier for the consumption. Youth feel, there is need for regulation as far as some objectionable content are concerned, but this regulation must be controlled by the users only. If else, the social sites would loose their credibility and finally, system will lose a true democratic forum.

Keyword: Social media, social networking sites, youth, India, Gambia, Pattern of social media, Comparative study, focus group study, media research.

Introduction

Social Sites have provided the youth a rare opportunity. Right to speech and expression was always in Free India (Except during Emergency in 1975) and Gambia since Independence. But practically, there was a need of a mass medium, compatible with the psyche of youth. One more reason was responsible for that. New media was offering the opportunity of expression without demanding anything. For News papers, there was the need to be the master of the words. Common youth was confined to just write the letter to the editor that also was bound to be edited. Advent of Electronic media could not provide any alternative. Rather, for a youngster, there were more technical glitches, keeping the drift widen between the media and common youth. But new player in the game i.e. new media came up with novice opportunity. It offered youth to be the master of message, which is meant for them. A dream of different sort of democracy was sown amidst the eyelids. But soon, the honeymoon session was over. To understand this a little backgrounder is needed to trace the progression path of social sites, especially in India and Gambia.

India & New Media

India is considered as Free and fertile land for the growth of any medium since right to speech and expression is guaranteed by constitution of India through Art. 19(1A). Probably, this was the reason why India joined the network of social sites in its initial days. Orkut was one of the earlier players in India. It did the same, As Friendster enveloped US society. They also shared the future. Both the sites rocketed height but plummeted within years. But there was no scope of any void.

Soon the gap was filled by facebook, which is having one billion member worldwide. And India is one of the biggest contributor in its number of netizens.

But Story of success never remains the sweet only. Digital divide has always been an impediment in India for the growth of new media. But new challenges from the political front are presenting serious threats. In fact, new media's role in Egypt revolution has rung the alarm bell for pro-establishment politicians throughout the world. Even in India, social sites played very important role for creating the ground for Anna movement. Hence media blame the government for having negative approach against social sites in India. *Freedom on the Net grades India* "Partly Free" in 2011. Selective censorship is on the way under the guise of security. What effect it would pour on the future of social sites, it remains to be seen.

Social Sites in Africa

Social sites were matured enough in Africa by the time facebook started and it just had to take the lessons with the past mistakes of other sites to refine their customizations and settings. Afrigator; a south African aggregator of African blogs and news, Zoopy; a you tube/ Flickr like service and Ushahidi; asms reporting and mapping engine from Kenya, were the three sites which captured the International Attention which led to the major investment for them. These sites are said to be the mile stones in the journey of social sites Africa.

At present facebook is most popular in Africa, keeping its world trend. It brought the older relations together and provided an easy connectivity to all classes by using various filters. Other than face book, LinkedIn emerged as an association of professional people accordingly.

But the road was not smooth enough. Africa was having the pockets of internet connection all over the country. Cost factor kept it much specific and limited to some people. Even in these days, though the VSat has connected many remote areas even to the internet yet the problem of terrestrial broadband infrastructure still exists in Africa. This is one of the reasons for what Twitter shut down its international services in continent. But technical glitches are not the only road blocks for social sites.

Gambia is regularly blamed to crush the right to freedom of expression. Various cases can give the glimpse. In 2006 the Gambian police has delivered an unseen threatening order. Police ordered all subscribers to an online newspaper to report to the police. Order unambiguously stated that that every subscriber, who does not comply with the order will have to face arrest. As it was not enough, in 2007 a Gambian new media journalist was convicted t sedition and was fined USD12,000.

Objectives of the Research

- A. To find out the reasons behind the use of fake identity
- B. Possible impact of monitoring the social sites
- C. Comparative Analysis of Using patterns of Social Sites between India & Gambia

Contribution to the Field of Study

Throughout the globe, two extreme views are prevailing as far as issue of freedom of Social Sites is concerned. One view states there is no need to check the social sites as it will be against the right to speech and expression. Second one believes that social media is creating the anarchy in the name of right to speech and expression. Amidst this it becomes imperative to know the viewpoint of youth

of of two different regions. Their experience and views would through the light on the possible ways to deal with the situation.

Review of literature

Social Media has put the society in dilemma. On one hand data disclose that use of social sites is registering the robust growth day by day. In U.K, Intel, renowned market intelligence co., came up with the finding that age group of 16-24 is having maximum media exposure. 50 percent of this age group admitted to have the television on as background noise. **(Youth Media Consumption Habits - UK - October 2010, 2010) (Rebecca McGrath, 2016)**

Prior to it, MTV's 2008 Young Universe Dossier conducted a research on 8 million youngsters in 9 Brazilian cities. It covered 49 million young people across the country aged between 12 and 30 from the upper, middle and lower classes. The research states that Internet is regarded the most convenient way to get in the know, the one with the best information content and the closest to people of its generation..(Cunha)why this new media is gaining the popularity, a research was conducted by the Department of Journalism in California Polytechnic State University. Researcher Jayne Scunciofound : The inherent dialogic nature of new media gives them the ability to function as a communicative Web device. It provides the ability to connect and communicate with consumers in a more personal and informal way.

But there is flip side of the coin too. Researches state even the internet users are not completely relying on it. Discussing the latest findings of PEW's research, Lee Rainie, director of Internet, Science and Technology research at the Pew Research Center states that 40 percent US citizens believe on the news presented by News organizations while only 4 percent rely on the news received from social sites.

So what the readers are actually doing with this platform. Global Web Index report gives the answer. It's survey responses about how people spend their time on social media sites. For Twitter, Facebook, and Google+, the report found the following:

- The most popular activity on Twitter is reading a news story
- The most popular activity on Facebook is clicking the "Like" button

But is is going to alter the shape of future media. Are the social media content is credible enough or Is liking and reading are really 'innocent behavior'. Researchers are having doubt over it.In a research article of PEW "The Future of Free Speech, Trolls, Anonymity and Fake News Online" LEE RAINIE, JANNA ANDERSON AND JONATHAN ALBRIGHT find" Many experts fear uncivil and manipulative behaviors on the internet will persist – and may get worse. This will lead to a splintering of social media into AI-patrolled and regulated 'safe spaces' separated from free-for-all zones. Some worry this will hurt the open exchange of ideas and compromise privacy.

However it is also true that there are many worlds within this globe. Print and other media may have serious challenges in US, but in India it's success graph is registering upward growth. , Indian Institute of Mass Communication conducted a survey, which revealed the fact that in India replacement of newspapers by the internet seems to be more of a distant prospect. Newspapers and Internet are partners in an alliance which would help each other in mutually reinforcing their own readership base.

Contrary to Global trend behavior of Indian youth is different. It is relying on social media for news too. Fortis healthcare has conducted a study on the behavior of online presence, likes and dislikes and stated that in India, youth believe the social media for news and other related activity. (Parikh)

Keeping in view the findings of above mentioned research there is a need to the using pattern of Indian Youth. comparative analysis with another country will through the better light on the nuances of 'Indian pattern', if it really exist.

Research Design& Methodology

Researchers adopted the focus group study as it's an appropriate methodology to deal the issue. It helped immensely to delve into the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of African and Indian youth for social sites.

Four groups were formed, each comprising of eight students with equal participation of African and Indian ones. Among the respondents, the male and female ratio was equal i.e. 4:4 out of 8. They all were undergraduates. It was well ensured that all the persons were having their laptops and internet facility 24*7 (Wi-Fi or through other means).

Findings of Focus Groups

What is the difference in using pattern of both the countries?

90% of Gambian students give their nod on using social sites regularly. While ten percent of them share that the use of it once in 3-4 days. Indian students are agree they go to social sites. One of them says that she is not having any social site account since it could capture all of my attention.

Gambian students say that they open e mail account first. They go to some other informative sites and then social sites. Indian students admit that they open first Facebook and then they surf other social sites or websites.

Gambian students' time consumption on social sites varies between 30 minutes to 2 hours in a day. Indian students' average time consumption on social sites is 4 hours in a day.

Why they use fake identity?

- On use of fake identity, there is a mixed opinion of Gambian students. Some of them promptly denied of using it while some have given their nod to use it. One female student says 'we feel fake identity helps us to disclose and discuss very personal facts. 'We get more honest opinions, if you are stranger on social sites'. One quipped, others agreed.

The opinion of Indian students was almost on the same line. They accepted frankly of using the fake identity. One of them says 'It's just like a time pass.'

Other says 'Fake identity can disclose many interesting things about others but it keeps ourselves stranger to them'. One of them says 'fake identity gives a platform for open free interaction without revealing the identity of the user.

- 'Whether the quality of **Content or its language is ethically right**'. There is a great difference between the opinions of Gambians and Indians on this issue. They admit 'violent' words are in fashion' in comparison to vulgarity. Almost half of the Gambians feel that social sites are the open medium to express and ask. Issue of the language is meaningless. It should not be checked under any circumstances, if it will be so; the reason of its origination become ended which is actually in

the route of democracy. While other 50 % of them believe that discipline is necessary on these sites too. There should not be any such a content which can generate the feeling of animosity in society.

On the other end, All Indian participants agree on the issue of quality and language of content. Abusive language is bigger problem in comparison to violent words. One of them says that 'Sometimes we speak beyond limits and use abusive language. We become over expressive and hardly attach any respect to any chair, may be political personalities or any other dignitaries.'

If, social sites' content is started to be monitored, Will you continue with them ?

50% of Gambians reacted and expressed their anguishes on this by saying 'if it happens we will prefer to quit from social sites. 'While other 50% say 'we will continue there even after monitoring starts'.

Indian students' opinions were divided on this point. Fifty percent don't bother about monitoring. While 50% are in dilemma what will they do if social sites if it is monitored.

If rough and unparliamentarily language attracts you? On this Gambians express their consensus and say Yes. They collectively agree that rough language fetch people towards the post, links or any other content. One of them says that 'Sophisticated words may be ignored; it might be possible that we don't pay our attention on them. But we never forget that person who abused us ever. Same here on social sites to get attention people are using this type of language increasingly. '

Indian students' opinion varies over here. One of them promptly responds 'No I will never go through that link or post which is having any rough sort of language.' However, all Indians agree that too find content having abusive language on their wall. One says 'It creates an automatic curiosity in our mind and we go through once at least with that. '

Why the use of abusive languages is occupying the place on social sites so increasingly?

On this Gambians gives many reasons. One of female students says 'Just to pore out frustration, people use this sort of language.' Other student says 'It happens when people fetch out there personal issues over social sites, they forget its social sites and issues should be here social only .Other utters 'social sites are a very easy platform to defame anybody as there is no need to prove yourself. She added 'You cannot use any kind of defamatory content neither verbal nor libel on electronic or print media as there is a need to prove that but social sites open the door to express openly without using any filter.'

Indian students give some other reasons. One of them says 'one use this just to get notified, means for sake of publicity.' Other states ' In India, though we are claiming for the largest democracy but parallel to this we are having many problems like corruption, Black money etc. Due to which the dissatisfaction towards the system has been developed, and to show this dissatisfaction people adopt this kind of rough language'. The other one says 'Due to our personal grudges we do this'.

If, there is hesitation to comment on political issues. One of the mass communication student said that any political comment, which govt. 'feels' defamatory can put you behind the bars. However they are agree that only a few incidents have happened of this nature but it has put psychological check on their e-communication on political issue. One Gambian student marked the comment 'Democracy in true senses is not there, it is not safe to comment direct on political matters. If you do so you would be arrested. It happened in past. However Indian students are quite frank to comment on political issues. They feel that social sites are the best place to raise your voice in a democracy.

Data Interpretation & Analysis:

- Discussion indicates that dependency of youth on social sites are at hike. Being more concerned towards their development, Gambians use the new media in more focused manner. Probably that's why they first check their email account than they come to social sites, where one interacts with the entire social group. However, It could also be said that Gambians are adopting a little stereotype method for connectivity with the world : First email than Social Sites. On the other hand Indian are doing just the opposite, enjoying their experience with the new media. Undoubtedly there are exceptions, just like the Indian student who despite the facility of e mail connectivity is not willing to have a social site account, just for academic reasons.
- Results also indicate there are different type of dependency traits in social sites. Indian youth, experienced in the media, are investing more time. While Gambian students still prefer on personal connectivity instead of social sites.
- Discussion point toward the situation that social sites are passing through a paradoxical situation. On the one hand they have to provide a space where everyone is having the opportunity to express him/her up to the extreme level. On the other, for being 'social' they are expected to have a control over them. Here, begins the contradiction
- Discussion indicates Gambian students are averse of passing political comment due to fear factor: some one may watch them. Even a few incidents to punish the bloggers in Gambia, is enough to put a mental block for expressing political thoughts freely. On the other side, Indian students are willing to use the media as democratic weapon. Population wise Indian youth have become the most powerful section of society. Economically, they are having more opportunity than their parents had, when they were youth. But in political circle, they feel, their voice remains unheard. This seems one of the reasons of outcry of youth in social sites.
- As far as abusive language is concerned, it seems a social phenomenon. Almost all the media of mass communication in India are using rough language. Even after the existence of censor board, films songs purely based on the abuses are getting popular. Gen Z is untrained as far as sophisticated language is concerned. They are worried only about their feelings which are not any how Xerox copies of anyone else. Again there are -psychologically abusive language is also related with the phenomena of Catharsis. It seems suppressive feelings for long are turning up in the form of abusive language in social sites. However, it is true this complicates this condition for those, who are the advocates of status quo. Gambian Students are concerned they are averse of abusive language in comparison to Indian youth as far as social sites are concerned. But they are using more violent words in social sites. It seems socio political unrest in Africa especially tribal clashes is responsible for it.
- Discussion also reaffirms one more paradox. Content using the abusive language, catch more users. However on ethical note neither Indian nor Gambian students are its supporter.
- Fake identity is again a complicated issue. Administration has apprehension that this fake identity might be used against the system. But neither Gambians nor Indian participants say that they use fake identity as a political tool. As pointed out Indian users dare to comment politically as they are willing to enjoy their right to speech and expression. While Gambian students rarely show any interest in political happening. Youth often prefer fake Identity

either to express their selves or to delve into their peer group. Although it could not be said ethically right, but often its motive is not to hurt anyone.

- As the fear begins that some one is peeping in, free expression is getting affected. Social sites developed due to feel of free space. If sense of freedom evaporates, attraction of social sites could also suffer. Both African and Indian are of the view that content monitoring is needed but it should be from within. It looks netizens are not against the idea of developing a code of conduct but they are very much against that any other authority control them. In this case a major section of netizens may leave the medium.

Conclusion

Research shows that across the world youth feel in 'Highly regulated' system social sites may suffer badly. Even the fear that someone is 'peeping in', can create the damage. Youth believe, Fake identity is not always used for ill motive. Instead, in many a cases most of the cases it is being used for having a feel of freedom of speech. Use of improper language must be criticized, but Netizens are willing to have a self control mechanism but not at the cost of freedom of speech. However, issue of national integration of communal harmony could not be compromised.

Suggestions for Further study

Researchers attempt to see the trend of usage of social media networking sites. Different culture, different geo-political and social situations create different set of behavior. But aspirations of youth are almost common in all over the world. It would be suggested to conduct continuous study to find the behavior trends in different part of the world.

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