

A Study on the Potential Role of Social Media as a Driving force for Jallikattu Protest

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Abstract

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and Instagram are extensively used to share knowledge around the world, with the power of "Immediate reach" and "Ease to edit". This ends up in the result of Uncontrollable flow of information reaches to many recipients. This is apparent in the widespread protests in the Middle East and North Africa known as the "Arab Spring" in the years of December 2010-December 2012, and locally in Tamilnadu- India "Pro-Jallikattu Protest" in January 2017. This study tries to find how social media played a vital role to influence the ordinary people as an active participant of Jallikattu protest.

Keywords: Social Media, People's Movement, Arab Spring, Jallikattu

Introduction

Social Media is an internet based communication tool used as collective outlets of storing/delivering digitalized information or data in the form of word content, Videos and Photographs. The study of Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, says that social media are a group of internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the production and exchange of user-generated content¹. Social media can take any form of tech-enabled activities such as blogging, social gaming, social networks, and virtual networks and so on.

People who use social media to keep in touch with relatives, friends and career opportunities find people who share a common interests exchange more content. People who engage in these activities become part of virtual social network. For advertisers, Social Media is an indispensable tool to offer customer service. Politicians utilize social media to engage constituents and voters. In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, social Media act as conduit of misleading false information has been well documented. Such a powerful influence of social media allows anyone to

reach millions of audience with content that lacks oversight or fact checking.

At present the world is witnessing many people's movements and revolutions for which social media is one of the main motivating factor. For example a short video of the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, shared and reshared on social media, might spark the uprising of Arab spring². From then on there were different movements formed for various factors such as Anna Hazare-led anti-corruption movement in India, street protests demanding justice for the brutal Delhi gang rape of 2012, Hakkolorob movement started in Jadhavpur University against problematic handling of reported case of molestation on campus on August 24, 2014, social media acted as a catalyst, bringing millions of people a voice. Social networks have been used to relay a sense of urgency in events, thus leading to immediate individual response. This helps mostly when the situation requires immediate evacuation efforts or funding³. An example of this is during the Chennai floods of 2015 and Kerala floods of 2018, when masses of civilians organised to help people who were affected, through social networks. This shows that Social media plays a potential role in the life of young

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people, who share their thoughts and dreams with their friends and even with strangers whom they meet online⁴.

Jallikattu or Sallikkattu, also known as manju virattu, is a traditional sport practised in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations (Harvest Festival) on Mattu Pongal day, which occurs annually in the month of January. In which a particular breed of Bull namely Kangayam breeds⁵, is released at the Vaddi Vasal or the gate, human male participants attempt to grab the large hump on the bull's back with both arms and hang on to it while the bull attempts to escape. Participants who holds the hump as long as possible, attempt the bull to stop is awarded with Prize. In some cases, participants must ride long enough to remove flags on the bull's horns⁶. As there were events of injury and death associated with the sport, both participant and to the Bull forced into it, the animal rights organizations have called for a ban to the sport, resulting which the court banned this sport several times over the past years. However, with protest from the people against the ban, a new ordinance was made in 2017 to continue the sport.

Literature Review

While social media originated risings, which rippled all over the world including Bangladesh, Philippines, Tunisia and Egypt, India also felt a wave of such movement starting from "Anti-corruption movement in 2011" started by the activist Anna Hazare, contributed to the change of Government itself. Facebook and Twitter played a major role by creating various pages with the aim of making India corruption-free. The message passed on was simple: "If you want a corruption-free India, join the movement"⁷. Many people signed these online petitions through different social media platforms, raising their voices against the problem of corruption. Arvind Kejriwal, politician and supporter of Anna Hazare's Anti- corruption movement, became a leader and later formed a party named, the Aam Aadmi Party. This newly formed party went on to win 2013 Legislative Assembly elections held in Delhi, as the party's plea matched with the popular voice.

Social media has come to act as a catalyst for opening up new platforms for dialogue, debate and deliberations based on different issues⁸. The convocation lecture of C.P. Chandrasekhar, at Asian College of Journalism, speaks that how the spread of social media is forming a fifth estate that will displace the fourth estate. "The fifth estate is indeed delivering through tweets, Facebook posts, blogs and the like – a large volume of information and opinion of newsworthy events and other subjects," he adds⁹. An article by Clay Shirky in Foreign Affairs magazine, states that political movements all over the world, including Philippines (Joseph Estrada was ousted), Iran (Green Movement to protest the miscount of votes for Mir Hossein Mousavi),

Moldova and Thailand (Red Shirt uprising), used social media including text messages, email and photo sharing, etc. He also question's in the article: Do digital media tools really enhance democracy? Thus he concludes that these tools might help in the long run and might have very dramatic effects¹⁰.

Martin Baumann, research scholar who conducted a research on Tamil Diaspora in the part of East Germany concluded by saying that, "The Tamil Diaspora in the above said geographic location, enter into their third decade of living in their new homeland, and they purposely intend to root their culture and traditions in the adopted country of residence. The building of temples in a foreign nation is a classic example".¹¹

Jallikattu or Sallikattu (in Tamil) has to be found for more than 4000 years ago. The Wikipedia states the other names of this sport is Manjuvirattu means bull chasing or Eruthazhuvuthal which means embracing the bull. According to Iravatham Mahadevan, who is a specialist in Indus and Brahmi scripts a very well preserved seal was found at Mohenjodaro, in the 1930s which proved the traditional sport initially originated from the Indus valley civilization¹². T.S.Subramanian mentioned in his article The Hindu, daily newspaper Bull chasing, an ancient Tamil tradition, in those days the Tamil people believed, the taming of the bull has stood for the meaning of a powerful man and virility¹³.

According to Mr. Karthikeyan Sivasenapathy, Managing Trustee of Senaapathy Kangayam cattle research foundation there are numerous reasons which contribute to the decline of the indigenous breeds is that the Animal Husbandry department is not supporting much to protect the native breed of bulls of Tamilnadu¹⁴. He also adds that there are many corporates whose greed in conquering the local milk industry, this makes them to call out for the ban of the traditional sport, Jallikattu.

Objectives

This study aims to

- To analyze social media's significant role in propagating the Jallikattu Protest.
- To understand how cultural identity of Tamil people draws attention of the Protestants in different locations through social media in reference to selected Jallikattu related articles.
- To understand the Cultural rights of Tamil community involved in the Ban of Jallikattu.

Methodology

This study adopted the Content Analysis of selected online articles and videos, which are related to Jallikattu protest

and the cultural rights violation of Tamil Community, was taken. The timeframe taken for analysis is two months December 2016 and January 2017, during which other social media entities were also identified.

Parameters of the online articles are as follows:

- Content and details given by the article
- Vocabulary, choice of words and complexity of the language
- Nature of the news article
- Standpoint of the reporter or News agency
- Recognizable agenda of the news article
- Association of picture or infographics with the article and its influence
- The details of the protest (place/people/method of protesting)

Findings

Research Findings are as follows:

- In the beginning of December 2016, most social media activists were preoccupied with late Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa's hospitalisation and subsequent by her demise, then with Cyclone Vardah, which made major disaster in Chennai and its nearest places.
- Around the mid of December, several social media pages began to posts contents dedicated about Jallikattu and its importance, which is in discussion since 2014.
- Social Media networks such as Chennai Memes, Put chutneyand Tamizhan memes created and posted photos and videos to support Jallikattu. With the aim of continuing the leaderless protest on a single track, the larger social media networks issued periodic advisories to the protestors.
- Some of the prominent hashtags used during the campaign are "Jallikattu" was in at least 6 lakh tweets, mostly from various places of Tamil Nadu, between January 5 and January 20. Another hashtag "Justice for Jallikattu", had been tweeted over a million times between January 17 and 20¹⁵. It is noticeable that because of social media entities with large follower groups seeded this people's movement, which then took on life of its own, spreading far and wide in a short period of time. Another hashtag that emerged was "We Do Jallikattu", budding on January 7. After stray incidents of people ignoring the Supreme Court ban were reported, thus the hashtag "We Did Jallikattu" made an appearance on January 13. "I Support Jallikattu", which started appearing on January 9, was initially used to support the movement, but after the protests began, it was used to coordinate the events, and plan food and water for the protestors.
- The Tamil people protested from various parts of globe were homogenous in a way unlike the crowd

in Marina beach, Chennai. The protesters were elite class literates, who either worked for MNCs or Indian students studying in foreign institutions. While they were protesting, the anger they had for their communal identity struggle was not shown on their faces unlike the case of Chennai protests. Instead only written slogans or placards spoke for it.

- The News article taken for this study were online news articles which followed an audiovisual aid technique. Videos and photographs of the protest arena were seen as silent marching with placards.
- The protest which was seen through the studied articles saw a combination of all three types of internet involvement, namely 1. Awareness about the Tamil people spoke about the Jallikattu ban and how the corporates greed to conquer the local milk business and to create an artificial decline on the native breeds of bull. 2. Organization of words like "We are expecting more crowd to join our protests" makes Tamil people to take part in the protests. And 3. Action or reaction when the videos of them protesting or marching were shown
- Out of the online article analyzed, was "Tamil Pride" through which the categorical marking can be taken as the Tamil community across the globe wants to seek kinship, wants to have a sense of togetherness, a home away from home by either demonstrating or participating in the protest.
- In the articles where there were 3 news items which quoted people pertaining to Tamil people saying that Jallikattu is a culture of Tamil identity and not as Indian identity.
- The vocabulary used for almost all of the articles analyzed, used simple languages, no jargons.
- At times even repetitive words were used, they were "cultural pride", "to our brothers and sisters" which again can be related to the tendency of a Tamil culture person to cherish or treasure their collective past.
- The tone of the articles analyzed, expressed the stance of the news items as pro Jallikattu and it also had the function of "to instruct" people to join the movement and express their solidarity morally. The agenda of the article was as such to tell that the Tamil people who were protesting in various parts of Tamilnadu and not alone in doing so.

Conclusion

A number of factors converged to help jallikattu become the successful movement that it was. However, there is no doubt that the show of strength heavily mobilised by social media forced the hand of the legislators. This study confirms findings by many researchers showing that, while social media as a stand-alone mechanism may not help achieve the goals of a movement, it is a vital tool that speeds up organisation and message propagation, making it

possible for movements to gain traction in a matter of days or even just hours, unimaginable in the pre-digital era.

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