

Social Media and Social Movement: Contemporary Online Activism in Asia

PRIYAM BASU THAKUR & SANGITA DE
Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, India

In contemporary era social media and mass movement are playing a crucial role in global public sphere. Statistics shows that in the countries of Asian continent active social media penetration is flourishing with times. The paper will attempt to conduct an explanatory research by using analysis of Twitter Revolution (Iran), Umbrella Revolution (Hong Kong), Sunflower Protest (Taiwan), Shah Bag Movement (Bangladesh), Delhi Gang Rape Agitation (India) and Bersih Movement (Malaysia). In the context of theoretical framework, the paper will attempt to discuss public opinion of Walter Lippmann (1922), the structural transformations of the public sphere by Jurgen Habermas (1964), social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) by Reicher, Spears & Postmes (1995), mediapolis of Roger Silverstone (2007) etc. The paper will primarily try to identify the role of social media in mobilizing social movement of Asian region.

Keywords: Social media, social movement, on-line activism, collective action, computer mediated communication, mobilization

In the perspective of evolution of social media, the next recognizable factor is the emergence of Blog (web log). Then MySpace and LinkedIn, Hi5, Yahoo!360 etc. have achieved a great acceptance worldwide from 2005 onwards. Approximately at the same time YouTube also accelerates the growth of social media. Then the genesis of Facebook and Twitter universalize the social media with its immense power of interactive communication and left its impact in socio-political upheavals in different parts of the world with different circumstances.

The documentation of online activism via social media appeared on social networking sites in many parts of the world. But the best examples of online political activism were – Green revolution in Iran, Egyptian revolution, Occupy Wall Street movement in USA etc. which created a new avenue in the history of social movement. In 2009 after the declaration of the result of Iranian presidential election, a huge mass protest commenced against the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Defeating candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi led the spontaneous mass demonstration with the slogan “Where is my vote?” Protesters uploaded pictures, video footage, call from the rally in social media which led a quick mobilization and dissemination of news about the upsurge in Iran. Iran’s Green Movement clarifies the reality that the social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, text messaging, and photo sharing could play a functional role towards the participation in social movements (Moghanizadeh, 2013). Next year a huge civil protest also known as Jasmine revolution erupted in Tunisia against the President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali with the issues like unemployment, especially in interior and western part of the country, food inflation,

Correspondence to: Priyam Basu Thakur, Department of Mass Communication & Videography, Rabindra Bharati University, Emerald Bower Campus, 56A, B.T. Road, Kolkata-700 050, India. E-mail: priyambasuthakur@gmail.com

price hike, corruption, political repression, absence of freedom of speech and expression, poor standard of living etc. President Ben Ali and his family were compelled to flee from Tunisia. Recent study shows that 48 per cent Tunisians participated in the revolutionary optimism (Moaddel, 2013, p.4).

Facebook and Twitter had been heavily censored during the revolution. Tunisian revolution spread across the wider Arab world and it became a model for Middle East countries like Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco etc. In Arab spring the most prominent is Egyptian revolution where protesters gathered in Tahrir Square and organized mass protest against the three decades long autocratic rule of President Hosni Mubarak. After a massive unrest President Mubarak had to resign and handed over the power to the military. "The Egyptian revolution, therefore, demonstrates the opportunities offered by social media for large-scale mobilization and the organization and implementation of social movements. Additionally, the use of social media helped to draw local and international attention to important activities that otherwise may have been shielded from public view, thereby isolating the participants. "Social media introduced speed and interactivity that were not possible through the reliance on traditional mobilization resources such as brochures, faxes, and telephones." (Eltantawy, Wiest, 2011, p.1218)

Arab spring left its vital impact on Occupy Wall Street movement which was originated by the call for protest from a magazine named 'Adbusters'. Activists united in Zuccotti Park in financial district of New York City and started the occupy movement in 2011. This movement raised voice with the symbolic slogan "we are 99 per cent" against the economic imbalance, austerity, incisive influence of bank and MNCs over the political system, the role of Wall Street in creating economic recessions. "Occupy Wall Street quickly spread beyond New York. People gathered in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, Atlanta, San Diego and hundreds of other cities around United States.....in a matter of weeks, the occupations and protests has spread worldwide, to over 1,500 cities, from Madrid to Cape Town and from Buenos Aires to Hong Kong, involving hundreds of thousands of people" (Gelder, 2011, p.2). Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and others photo sharing and video sharing tools of social media provided Occupy Wall Street movement a global reach and gain solidarity worldwide.

Literature Review

Tarrow (1994) defined social movements as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (as cited in Moghanizadeh, 2013, p.12). By proposing this definition Klandermans (1997) concluded that, "social movements, then, are populated by individuals sharing collective goals and collective identity who engage in disruptive collective action"(as cited in Moghanizadeh, 2013, p.12). And to share their goals they have to have a large platform which is always open to all and also have to be user friendly. Traditional mass media can generate the news about the incidents and issues but it is largely opinionated by the media itself. Although they gathered news and views from the very ground levels and also from the participants, those are specifically going through agenda setters and gate keepers in the process of transforming into an end product. Now in this situation internet generates social media like blogs, you tube, face book and also is widely used and effective in the process of mobilisation in case of various social movements all over the world. Curtis defined Social Media as "the platforms on the internet where people interact freely, share and discuss information about personal and various socio-political issues using a combination of verbal, pictorial and audio-visual expression" (Curtis, 2015, p.1).

Various researchers give their different views on the correlation between social media and the social movement. Somayeh expresses his views on the social media's role in mobilisation, motivation to participate and related barriers. In discussions of the role of the social media in the authoritarian societies, he says that "social media tools and new communication technologies in such societies, in the absence of open media, and democratic political sphere have potential to play a significant role in terms of facilitating communication among individual and recruitment networks and increase the speed of mobilization, decrease cost of participation and reinforce motivations to participate" (Moghanizadeh, 2013, p.15).

Social media instigates a raise against an issue almost instantly through its rapid information sharing attributes but sometimes the causes behind the specific matter or issue remain unnoticed by the social media users. The main effect of the social media on the social movements now a days is the speed which accelerates the dissemination of news, ideas and opinions widely within an instant despite the existence of government censorships (Baily, 2012). In expressing views on the impact of the social media on the two revolutions of Iran and Egypt Baily outlines that social media allows oppressed citizens to effectively organize themselves by being properly informed as the news on current issues are disseminated through the social media. Previously they were denied of the relevant information as it was severely censored by the authorities. And also it is the fact that "people too often ignore the more complex factors at the root of discontent, and instead focus on the possibility that social media played the decisive factor in overthrowing corrupt governments" (Baily, 2012,p.33).

Lopes (2014) did his research on the relation between social media as an organizational tool and the pre-existing social, economic and institutional conditions for the surfacing of social movements all over the world. According to his research orientation and subsequent result, "the Facebook model does not show a relationship between Facebook and protests but the Internet penetration model does prove that social media is a statistically significant predictor of protest activity" (Lopes, 2014, p.19).

Clark in his research work 'Social Movement and Social Media : A Qualitative Study of Occupy Wall Street' (2012) discusses about the information scenario, communication and organization during the movement of Occupy Wall Street, the role played by the traditional and social media and reporting and framing of news by the traditional media. Social media becomes a new media format which allows many voices to be heard and also provides unaltered video and pictures, etc. without any major control and regulation. And social media broadcasts real time messages from any place instantly to anyone all over the world and thus connects people worldwide which enhances mobilization factor widely (Clark, 2012).

Diani (1999) in his research paper "Social Movement Networks Virtual and Real" specifically sets his focus on two aspects – communication between individuals and organizations, and on the expansion of collective identities. According to him, "communication technology allows to set up discussion groups between individuals interested in specific issue, thus encouraging interaction and starting polyadic, rather than dyadic communication dynamics" (Diani, 1999, p.3). Thus an all round communication is happening leading to collective decision making and subsequent collective action.

Social media's horizontal communication network generally forms a public sphere within its own context. Social movements have a global impact as one specific social movement inspires another one may be in other places and scenario. All round intensive communication potentials of social media make it believable to rise against the discrimination in every sphere of society. "Internet and wireless communication, by enacting

a global, horizontal network of communication, provide both an organizing tool and a means of debate, dialogue, and collective decision making" (Castells, 2008, p.86)

Social media made it possible for the oppressed and marginalized groups to voice their demands to bring changes in legal, political and social scenario through intense citizens' participation (Shirazi, 2013). They are motivated with a common goal set through the common decision making in the social media. Social networking sites like face book, Twitter and you tube "provide citizens in repressed countries opportunities to participate in communication discourse by creating equifinal meaning which ultimately contributes to organized civil resistance and social actions" (Shirazi, 2013, p.43).

Postems and Burnstings (2002) investigate about the role of internet in transforming collective action. They discuss about the transformation from individual and group activism to social activism and the reasons behind it. "Online groups can have a strong sense of common identity or common purpose, and that the norms in online groups may be as potent as those found in other contexts. Thus in the right circumstances and conditions, strategic and cognitive processes may transform the internet from a potentially individualistic environment to a platform for highly involving social events" (Postems, Burnsting, 2002, p.295). In this social context he argues that internet may not change the activism but the possibility of generating meaningful collective action may change the internet itself (Postems, Burnsting, 2002).

There are various aspects in the usage and functions of social media in the sphere of social movement. Besides the intense use of social media, other social, political, cultural situation have to be considered behind the success or failure of the specific movements. And also the role of social media has to be measured in this context.

Objectives

Asia is the largest continent of the world with its diversity in the context of social-cultural-economical-political-religious nature. High degree of internet penetration helps in deindividuation of Asian citizens to take part in cyber public sphere and active participation in formation of public opinion. In various Asian countries a considerable number of social movements occurred where internet with its digital applications were used for dissemination of information. In this context, this study try to find out social media's role in mobilizing social movements and how netizens of Asian region promote collective action by using Mediapolis in computer mediated communication.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research is explanatory in nature. The researchers collected data from books, articles published in peer-reviewed journals, different scholarly publications, news contents from different media houses. The study tries to analyse the role of social media in social movement on the basis of collected secondary data. Different case studies were given to clarify the online activism in Asia.

Theoretical Consideration

Public Opinion

The concepts of 'opinion' and 'public' of the phrase 'public opinion' have gone through the transformation. The meaning of opinion changed from the notion of truthfulness of a

matter to the value judgment. And the concept public transform from the meaning of common access of some belonging (Habermas, 1989) to the common good or common interest. The phrase 'public opinion' changes its meaning from individual freedom to common will and public conscience. Philosophers like Rousseau, Bentham and Mill emphasize on the concepts of common shared interest and freedom of expression. Walter Lippman also explains different attributes of public opinion in his book 'Public Opinion' (1922). He argues that people live in a pseudo environment and responds accordingly as the real world is too big for them. Their perception is distorted by different aspects like privacy, censorship, propaganda, preconceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes. He further argues that public opinion is not formed but created by manufacturing of consent. Then he outlines the human emotions which is irrational in nature and complied with various ambiguous symbols. He says that people are generally self interested and the press satisfies their interests. He argues for the public's own opinion after informed intelligibly of the concerned situations by the press (media) which lead them towards taking a 'popular decision'. Besides he also argues for the social organizations' systematic analysis, decentralized decision making and the coordination of decisions.

Public Sphere

Aristotle argues that public sphere is a political and social space in which the citizens of a state discuss on the common issues and thus formed a consensus over it. Eminent theorist Jurgen Habermas (1964) refers to public sphere as "a realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974, p.49). He says that public sphere mediates between the society and the state as each stands against one another (1964). He considers the society as the holder of the public concern. According to Habermas (1964), "Access is guaranteed to all citizens and a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974, p.49). He also refers to the mass media as the platform of debate and discussions in the realm of public sphere. In the 'interactional dimension' of public sphere, media is the principal provider of information and relevant interpretation in interaction between media and the citizens and interpersonal and group communication happen in the interaction within the citizens themselves (Dahlgren, 2005). So the transformation is from "one to many" mode of communication specified by mass media to "one to one" communication mode. Group communication within different types of social media (internet) has features of both mass communication and interpersonal communication.

Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects

Social identity model of Deindividuation effects (SIDE) theorizes that submergence in a group leads to polarization of collective opinion within a group and promotes greater homogenize behaviour among the group members. S.D. Reicher, R. Spears and T. Postmes (1995) revised the conventional approach of Social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) based on group behaviour and they applied this model into the effects research in the context of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). In their analysis Reicher et al relates the factors like anonymity and social identity with the self-categorization theory. "...the classic deindividuation paradigm of anonymity within a social group, far from leading to uncontrolled behaviour, maximizes the opportunity of group members to give

full voice to their collective identities” (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995, p.161). In farther study R. Spears and T. Postmes analyze online collective activity by applying SIDE model in the new media research which includes e-mail, internet, and social networking sites (SNS) and give empirical evidence. “.....SIDE research has shown time and again that online representations of individual group members can exert a considerable influence in fostering impressions of the group as a unit” (Spears & Postems, 2015, p.39).

Mediapolis

In his book ‘Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis’, Roger Silverstone, professor of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science introspects the term mediapolis. He opines that concurrent media permit interpersonal mode of communication which in case of broadcast and reciprocal way pertains the amalgamation of speech and action and although in the symbolic domain of mediated portrayal; they reproduce in an intensively technology mediated form; the digressive and judgement arena of the polis (Silverstone, 2007). In an article named The Internet as a Moral Space: the Legacy of Roger Silverstone published by London School of Economics and Political Science, Shani Orgad (2007) discusses about the emerging global public sphere in cyberspace.

Online Activism: Asian Continent

After the world war - II many Asian countries started political struggle to become free from imperial control and it is marked as the age of social upheavals in the history of Asia. A new way of protest emerged from the end of the last decade. Green movement in Iran acts as a vanguard in this context. During the 2009 Presidential Election a huge protest exploded on the issue of biased election. The enormous use of social media transformed the structure of social movements in Asia as well as it left a deep inspiration on Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Bersih movement in Malaysia and Umbrella revolution in Hong Kong raised the voice of common man for the reformation of electoral system of two countries. In these two cases social media was used extensively to mobilize the protesters. In Sunflower revolution of Taiwan, students from different universities of country led the campaign for agitation against the trade pact signed between Taiwan and mainland China. They occupied the Yuan Legislation and set up their own network to disseminate live broadcast from the inside of the legislation. New media and internet revolutionised the anti-Beijing student movement in Taiwan. India, the largest democracy of the world experienced a spontaneous mass protest after Delhi gang rape case. Youth of India protested in the outside of Parliament and Raisina Hills with the demand of the punishment of rapist and to ensure the safety of the women. In this context social media played a very progressive role in raising issues of women safety from the every corner of country.

In India social media also acted as a catalyst during the anti corruption movement led by Anna Hajare. India's neighbour country Bangladesh also used social media as a tool for mobilizing the sympathizers during the Shahbag movement. In Bangladesh blog has become a popular tool for promoting ideas which cultivates plurality and ensures active participation of people in country's political system. A blogger Rajib Haider was brutally murdered by fundamentalists during the movement in Bangladesh. After the Shahbag movement more bloggers were killed in Bangladesh till now. In mid 2010 a colour specific conflict erupted in Thailand's political scenario. The Red shirt consisted of poor and middle class people, under the leadership of The United Front for Democracy against

Dictatorship (UDD) started agitation in Bangkok with the demand of dissolution of parliament and fresh election. Anti-nuclear movement in Japan also signifies the social media's role in pro-democratic movement. Almost in every cases government imposed heavy internet censorship by blocking social networking sites. Social media shapes a new platform of debate and discussion for the citizen and established a new cyber space for the formation of public opinion.

Case Studies

Green Revolution in Iran

Protest began with the declaration of the result of 2009 Presidential Election in Iran on 21 June, 2009 in which Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won. This election was claimed to be a biased election by the opposition leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. The protest had spread over the major cities of Iran from 2009 to 2010. This protest was named variously like Green Revolution after the colour of the campaign of Mir-hossein Mousavi and also Persian Awakening by the Western media. Various social media like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter were also used posthumously in support of the protest. An Iranian activist Neda Agha Soltan was shot and died and the video of the incident spread widely through YouTube. From this point social networking sites were used extensively to demonstrate the mass protest. The whole period of this social movement can be divided into three parts - pre election campaign, post election demonstration and the vigorous suppression of the green movement (Moghanizadeh, 2013). Facebook and Twitter were blocked by Iran government from almost before a month of June 12, 2009 presidential election. After the election Ahmadinejad's site gave information on attack tools through Facebook and Twitter. Internet access was stopped by the Iran Government intermittently. YouTube, Facebook were blocked and also mobile phone services including text messaging also had been stopped and during the post election phase the Iranian government filtered the sites most extensively.

In Twitter revolution, the Iranian government imposed censorship on the news media like Al Jazeera English, Al Arabiya, NBC News, BBC World Service, etc. Iranian Ministry of Culture issued a directive that all foreign media could not leave their office and on 20th June it banned all international media to report on the demonstrations of the street mass protest without the permission of the Iran Government. Iranian government-run television was not affected by this ban. The Washington Times wrote in its editorial on June 16, 2009 that Iran is a highly computer literate society with bloggers and hackers and the hackers especially helped to keep running the channel banned by the government. Thirty five percent of Iranians used the internet which was higher than Middle East internet use average of twenty six percent (Schleifer, 2009) But it was tough for the Iran government to entirely block Twitter because of its "open-ended design" that enabled access from various places while the government blocked other tools of social media (El-Nawawy, Khamis, 2012).

Twitter provided constant updates of the situation of the mass protest and its consequences and also gave links of photos and videos to demonstrate the protests and these were reported in external sources outside the very net crackdown by the Iranian Government (Keller, 2010). It played an important role to make the movement known to all outside Iran. The Western media exaggerated it as the sole agent of this movement. For 'The Atlantic', Andrew Sullivan wrote real time blogs by getting information from the Iranian Internet. Most of the blogs were written in English and not in the Farsi language as the site

could not accommodate Farsi language. Most of the bloggers were from the Iranian Diaspora and westernised in thought. And they influenced western bloggers in opinion formation while they themselves had been influenced by the Twitters written in Farsi. Twitter with its 140 word limits and its immediacy made it easy to disseminate information in a crisis situation through internet (Morozov, 2009). A Karaj-based unidentified Green activist who had three hundred followers tweeted in Farsi. It had been the source of information about Iran's situation (Esfandiari, 2010). A very small section of Iranian (35%) was tech savvy and internet educated westernised in nature. So their tweets had little effect on the vast portion of the people who protested on the streets. So there was little connection between these two sections of the Iranian society (Morozov, 2009).

Iranian society is religio-political in nature and it highly depends on the Shi'a clerics' rule, originated from the "Guardianship of Islamic Jurists" which had a control on the Iranian politics and society (El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012). The Islamic Republic also used the social media for disseminating their viewpoints. They were also organised in opposing the protest. On 19th June Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei announced the election legitimate and called it a "divine assessment" and said that there would be no toleration of protests. They gained the support of the vast people because of their anti westernised opinions. This movement did not have organized leadership as it emerged as an opposition to the biased election and was not properly planned (El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012). Fred Petrossian, an Iranian Journalist and editor of blogging network named 'Global Voices' using Hamid Tehrani as nick name said to the British newspaper The Guardian that "The west was focused not on the Iranian people but on the role of western technology." And he also said that "Twitter was important in publicising what was happening, but its role was overemphasised." (Weaver, 2010). The drawbacks of the Twitter movement could be that the movement was mainly led by the middle class Iranians but lower class working people suffering from high unemployment and inflation did not take part in it as they were more concerned about their survival rather than the political freedom. To be successful in any movement participation of all sections people is necessary (El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012). The possibility of tumbling the authoritarian government through 'slacktivism' meaning feel good but useless internet activism is not much (Morzov, 2009). "A Twitter revolution is only possible in a regime where the state apparatus is completely ignorant of the Internet and has no virtual presence of its own" (Morzov, 2009, p.12).

Sunflower Protest

As a counter for the Cross Strait Service Trade Agreement signed between Taiwan and China, a movement began on 18th March, 2014 in Taiwan with the symbolic use of sunflower for its heliotrope nature by a group of university students. It was also named as 'March 18 Student Movement' as it started on 18th March. Unrest started in the outside of Legislative Yuan against the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT). Students broke through the police barricade and forcibly occupied the Legislative Assembly hall. Protestors labelled the trade pact as a tactic of China for achieving economic and political control over Taiwan and they demanded clause by clause review of the pact. Students did not depend on mainstream media. As an alternative source they employed new media technology and formed an area of public sphere in cyber space. They created their own network with young netizen volunteers. "A -network of tech-savvy volunteers immediately began to use digital tools to broadcast their message to sympathizers and the public. Soon, thousands of citizens rallied on the streets outside the parliament to support the students inside." (Hung, 2015, p.147). In Taiwan, high degree of internet penetration, educated younger generation, a degree of

frustration about issues that has not been resolved through conventional political processes made it inevitable that these frustrations get displaced onto social media (Beckett, 2014). Protesters started live broadcast from the inside of Legislative Yuan with the help of iPad and live stream during the occupation and created the official website for the movement. Protestors used digital media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Google cloud, Hackpad, Ustream etc. and they gave regular updates by uploading news links, video footages, pictures, audio in live or recorded format on the website g0v.tw. National Taiwan University's Facebook page E-Forum had been followed by more than 100,000 people during the Sunflower Movement. The student reporters broadcasted the updates of protest throughout the day from inside and outside of the legislature. Young Taiwanese perfectly used hi-tech new media to organize and mobilized people for collective political action in the information age. The occupation ended in 24th day after the promise made by the Government. The instance of Sunflower movement created a new history in social media led social movement in Asia. It left a crucial impact on Umbrella revolution in Hong Kong.

Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong

The credential of Occupy Central or Umbrella revolution in Hong Kong was intensely involved with the political system of the country. According to the joint declaration by the Britain and China in 1984, the British territory Hong Kong was reverted to China as a Special Administrative Region in the year of 1997 and it has been governed with the principle of "One country, two systems". A fury exploded in late 2014 after the declaration of extremely conservative electoral reform proposal regarding the Legislative Council Election and Chief Executive Election by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) (Ortmann, 2015). The declaration states that a Nomination Committee (NC) will be constituted with 1200 members (most of them was pro-Beijing) and they will nominate candidates for the apex position of the country - Chief Executive (CE). Each candidate has to receive more than 50 per cent support from the members of Nomination Committee. Who receives the support from the majority will be appointed by the Central People's Government. This "North Korean style election" is a severe attack on the country's autonomy. An organization of Hong Kong Occupy Central with Love and Peace gave call for a non-violent civil disobedience with the demand of universal suffrage and used cyberspace to circulate their ideas. Protesters used umbrellas to protect themselves from pepper spray and tear gas extensively used by the police at the time of confrontation with them and for this reason this uprising came to be known as Umbrella Movement (Lee, 2014)

In this particular context the key role was played by the students of high schools and universities of Hong Kong in organizing thousands of protesters under the leadership of Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholarism. The mainstream media followed pro-mainland editorial policy so they covered news with negative orientation and conservative point-of-view regarding the Hong Konger's spontaneous movement. As an alternative source, social media helped to disseminate the ideology of youth activist against political dominance of mainland China. Social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, FireChat, and Weibo was massively used by the umbrella protester to communicate with revolutionary ideas during the movement. China govt. took decision to impose repressive censorship for controlling the internet but they could not stop apps like FireChat. It can connect the people via Bluetooth, Wi-fi facility provided by their Smartphone without the internet connectivity. According to the developers of FireChat, this app was downloaded by more than 100,000 times in a single day by the Hong Kongers during the

movement. This movement seriously affected the financial sector, transport system of the country and obviously bilateral relationship with China.

Bersih Movement

Bersih is a group of 89 non-governmental organisations of Malaysia which took initiatives of rallies and demonstrations for the reformation of the voting process in Malaysia which was corrupted and biased. Five opposition parties formed the concept of Bersih in 2005 and later various NGOs also participated in this movement. In 2007 first street protest happened which was named as Basih1.0. And after that political parties and NGOs decided to form a Bersih 2.0 in 2010 as a non-partisan movement devoid of any political intervene. The elections of 1999 had been unfair, so the need of the formation of Bersih was felt. While initially there was only the criticism about the unfairness of the electoral rolls, later at the Bersih 2.0 eight distinguished demands were raised. According to Rais people trust Bersih for the lack of its political orientation (Khoo, 2014, p.113). Rais said in an interview that for the mobilization Bersih had taken the tactics of using technology like Facebook, Blogs and other social media, 'speech' and the 'publicity by accident' which meant publicity gained by the atrocities of the government (Khoo, 2014, p.114). He also said that their strategies, tactics and activities were only getting focussed in the online media and in some selected traditional media. In 2007 Bersih rally blogging and you tube were two dominant social media while in 2011 Facebook and Twitter became more popular (Welsh, 2014).

Bersih means 'clear' in the language Melayu. This movement is called "the Coalition of Clean and Fair Elections" (Radue, 2012, p.64). In 2007 Bersih rally, only less than 10% non partisan activists were the opinion leaders and for this reason this rally did not achieve any public consciousness. In 2001 Bersih rally, 50-60 percent non partisans and opinion leaders were thousands of Facebook and Twitter activists (Radue, 2012, p.64). Before the rally of 2011 internet did play a more important role in mobilisation and organisation than after the rally when it was used to disseminate news on the situations of the movement. Videos, photos and the interviews of the participants were spread worldwide (Radue, 2012). In Malaysian restrictive media system internet played an important role of motivator and mobiliser. Tradition media was severely restricted and thus biased towards the government. The elite ruling class used to control the public sphere in Malaysia. But internet content was not under the restriction due to economic reasons as communication technology is provided for the foreign investment because of the launch of Vision 2020 to transform the country into an information society (Radue, 2012, p.66). Internet along with the police brutality in public protest helped the mobilisation of the democratising process of Malaysia. Not only the internet but also different political developments, collective actions and unintended happenings and consequences were the reasons behind the success of Bersih 2.0 (Radue, 2012).

Movement against Delhi Gang Rape

India experienced a mass protest in the street of Delhi before India Gate on 16th December 2012 against rape and eventual murder of a 23 year old girl in Delhi due to severe injuries after thirteen days of the incident. This had become a major issue of the country. Protesters demanded for the punishment of the accused and for stricter regulations for the safety of the woman. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter took a major role in the formation of public opinion. In a report of the Economic Times on 1 April, 2013, it was published that

the country has 66 million social media users (Ahmed and Jaidka, 2013, p.28). In this movement social networking sites were used extensively by both the activists and public who joined in the protest and Twitter was used widely which enabled a small and emerging section of Indian Public to change India's public sphere (Ahamed, Jaidka, 2013). It was evident that large scale mobilization unsettled to a certain extent the fundamental premises of the country and attempted to come up against states' oppression making it responsible and explainable to its citizens (Nigam, 2014). The movement was led by the protesters especially by the young people themselves hardly without ever the formation of any specific leadership as the movement's duration is of very short span. Every political party was declared unwanted by the protesters. Due to instant spread of the news the impact of the incident is such that working class people who were generally stayed indifferent in any type of movements also joined the protest despite various measures like tear gas, lathicharge, gas spray, water cannons taken by the police to scatter the protesters (Nigam, 2014). The protest took place on 21st December at India Gate, and in front of the Parliament and Raishina Hills, the President's House. Tens of thousands people signed an online petition to protest the incident (Kumar, 2014). Various Facebook groups like 'Gang Raped in Delhi', 'Delhi for Women's Safety' were formed to create a common platform for all to protest against the sexual assault (Kumar, 2014).

Social media like Twitter generated a big influence over the social movement of technologically driven society and had become the medium of information dissemination almost instantly to a large section of the receivers irrespective of geographical boundaries. This attribute raised the movement's impact widely in a short period of time. In the social movements it facilitated the three characteristics of protests – actors' engagement in distinct collective actions, a clearly defined opponent, informal networks and the sharing of collective actions (Ahamed and Jaidka, 2013). Informal network was built through tweets and retweets thus enabling the network becoming ever bigger than before. Social media gave a unique and individual voice to each and every protester and activist to share their grievances and opinions.

Shahbag Movement

Thousands of people gathered at Shahbag Mor in Dhaka on 5 February 2013 to protest against the verdict given to Bangladesh war criminals of the Bangladesh Liberation movement of 1971. This movement known as Shahbag Movement, was raised by using Blogs and other social networking sites. The activist bloggers of the Bangladesh Online Activist Network (BOAN) called for the gathering to demand for life sentence instead of life imprisonment of a rajakar, a war criminal of the Liberation War, Abdul Quader Mollah, then Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh, guilty of murdering and abetting rape. The verdict was given by the International War Crimes Tribunal set for the judgement of the war criminals of the Liberation War (Murshid, 2013). Tens of thousands of protesters gathered at Shahbag Mor and various social, political and cultural forces also were present there. This movement became phenomenal in a very short span of time and they continued to protest there for several weeks until the fulfilment of their demand (Hussain, Mostafa, 2014).

Social media took a major role in the movement. People used it both in the country and outside to mobilise people to join the protest and to disseminate news about the movement to gain public opinion in favour of it. They used Twitter broadly besides networking sites like Blogs and Facebook. Social media played a vital role to unite people

in this movement. The protesters used social media to raise awareness and to increase numbers of people at the rally. Any type of movement may be social or political are always generally pre planned and organised in manner where different social and political bodies used to take active part but in case of Shahbag movement the people mainly from younger generation joined the movement. They participated spontaneously to vent their anger personally towards the establishment and in this process they decided to gather in places to protest and an automatic leadership had grown. If social media was not used the movement could not be so large and effective in such a short time period (Curtis, 2015). Bangladesh government, set up by the Awami League started a project named "Digital Bangladesh" in 2009 to give internet access to all the citizens by 2021 to ensure a knowledge based society as it was one of their political mandates. Social networking sites including micro blogging site, Twitter provided news contents during the up rise without any stern measures of the government. People used Twitters with utter freedom of expression. Immediately after the shahbag movement the government amended ICT Act 2006 to restrict the social media (Hussain, Mostafa, 2014, p.7). So this freedom of expression in using social media enabled to raise the movement spontaneously to a high level with a bigger influence and it also may be that the then government sympathized with the movement as they were exceedingly suffered in the war.

Individuals communicated their thoughts and shared it with others and it showed how an open space for dialogue could generate more ideas and form public opinion. Among the users political parties, social icons and NGOs were less in number (Hussain, Mostafa, 2014). Online communication and interaction resulted in the mass mobilisation and participation of the citizens. Shahbag movement showed that individual opinion makers within the micro blogging sites facilitated the citizens' participation in the socio political debates and discussions and the emergence of the better connected online communities (Hussain, Mostafa, 2014). The protesters were mainly apolitical and from younger age. The half population of Bangladesh was twenty four years or under (Chowdhury, 2013). And they can be modern and progressive (Chowdhury, 2013) and liberal minded influenced by the vibrant civil society of the country and also internet educated to use social media and courageous enough to express their opinion in a democratic country.

Conclusion

In contemporary era Asian citizens witnessed a paradigm shift in revolutionary protests. The use of social media networks in many Asian countries plays a crucial role in socio-religious-politic context. Active internet penetration enables educated young generation to use social media as a weapon against inequality and repression. Social networking sites cultivate the idea of plurality. Opposition, marginalized and oppressed people also raise their voice on certain issues which shape social media as a democratic medium. Almost in every movement when censorship was imposed we experienced that foreign media collected news from the Facebook status, tweets of online social networks operated by the cyber protestor which helped to gain a global reach. During the movement Government of that particular country attempted to censor mainstream media then the rise of alternative media became inevitable.

Social media's impact on social movement has many facets. Social media's various features like speed, instantaneous nature, open ended design, user friendly approach and reduced cost help it becoming a mediated platform of communication for each and every people devoid of any class and social differences. The users of social media can be

anonymous, thus devoid of any risk of facing atrocities by the authority and of being shunned by the social elitist. So in any issue of common interest mass participation is possible through collective decision making leading to collective action and its prime contribution is that people come to know about the real event rather than getting opinionated news from traditional mass media and it helps them to take independent decision. According to Lippman public opinion formation depends on individual opinion making after being properly informed by the media. In this present time social movement opinion is somewhat formed through the social media. Social media users are informed themselves through participation and also in a networked system when real time information and subsequent opinion formed through social media almost by themselves. Here communicators are more important than the medium itself which is used only as a channel.

In the case of Shahbag and Delhi movement, social media played a vital role to spark the movement and in case of Iran and Bersih movement socio-political matter instigates the protest which later intensified by the social media participation. According to Habermas public sphere mediates between state and society. In case of Iran revolution, previously formed religious-politic sphere is more dominant and decisive factor over the virtual sphere for the country's long and sustained religious-political history. This revolution basically spread in an organised way by the opposition political party which later gained massive support from social media users and mass participation did not happen due to country's poor economic condition, computer illiteracy of a huge section of population. In case of Shahbag movement a strong public sphere is formed due to the cause of the movement. The onslaught of liberation war (1971) was massive and left its effect still in the mind of younger generation as almost all the families of Bangladesh had been suffered from war crime. Besides giving support to the movement, middle class intelligentsia of Bangladesh civil society has a big influence on the youth of Bangladesh. Here the virtual sphere is dominant over the political sphere and state affairs. It may also be possible that Bangladesh government led by Awami League intentionally did not hinder on the path of the movement as the League faced the onslaught of war mostly. In case of Delhi movement public sphere was formed widely which enabled mass participation from all the section of the society due to the sensitive issue of atrocities against women, grave nature of the crime and Delhi government's inactive gesture on women safety from a long time. In case of Bersih movement social media was used only as a tool for promoting the movement. Though devoid of political orientation it is itself a political issue as fair and just electoral system is a human, social and political right of the people. Here civil society formed the public sphere where social media became the mobilizer of the movement. Deindividuation is the most important aspect of social media.

People became deindividualised in social media forum when a matter of common concern and of grave nature happened and then they entered into collective thinking to stand for a call or not. In this social movement deindividuation happened due to the issues which affect or may affect all. In particular context of Sunflower movement and Umbrella movement an anti-Beijing incumbency already existed in society which heavily helped in the formation of public opinion. Social media here gives the arena of face to face discussion and judgement which referred by Silverstone as mediapolis. Thus the way social media functions and with what intensity and its contribution behind the success of social movement depend on various general aspects including socio-economic-political and also cultural issues.

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