



Role of Social Media in Social Change: Issues and Concerns

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Abstract:

Ever since human race has evolved, communication has been an effective medium to convey the feelings and the emotions. The earlier ways of communication and expression of feelings had reservations due to distances which caused hindrances to communicate over long distances. The pace of communication was slow. The innovations and advancement in technology and use of Social Media has bridged all gaps. Social media is a means that has brought the world on the same platform. It is an interface for communication that brought people closer to each other, reducing and removing the distances. The power of social media is hard to dismiss. Its value is immense. What, at one time, seemed like a trivial way to keep in touch with friends, sharing photos and jokes, has gradually now become a force for social change. Bringing to the forefront such subjects and expressions of thoughts and ideas which were previously unknown and unexpressed. This has brought about a deepening of conversations and empowering citizens of the world to unite and effect change in a number of ways. The exposure gained by active participation in Social Media has inspired people to speak out their minds and give vent to their emotions and feeling and consequently take action. The present paper deals with the issues and concerns involved in relation to the role of social media in bringing about social change.

Key Words: Social Change, Social Media, Communication, Expression, Awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since human race has evolved, communication has been an effective medium to convey the feelings and the emotions. Man's needs for communication are as strong and basic as his needs for food, sleep and love. The severest punishment which can be given to any one is isolation thereby depriving him of the basic need of communication. Communication involves interaction with our physical, biological as well as social environments. The earlier ways of communication and expression of feelings had reservations due to distances which caused hindrances to communicate over long distances. The pace of communication was slow. The innovations and advancement in technology and use of Social Media has bridged all gaps. Social media is a means that has brought the world on the same platform. It is an interface for communication that brought people closer to each other, reducing and removing the distances.

The power of social media is hard to dismiss. Its value is immense. What, at one time, seemed like a trivial way to keep in touch with friends, sharing photos and jokes, has gradually now become a force for social change. The extent of change, if any, however depends on the variations in the desires and inclinations of individual members of the group. It is important to note that one can learn things, without believing them, believe things without doing them, and do things without learning or believing them. Thus, initiating social change through social media involves a deliberation on a variety of aspects. Without communication an individual could never become a human being; without mass communication an individual could never become part of Modern society. In the present scenario, almost 43% of the world's population is in the age group of 25 years and below. This being, the age of dynamism and energies, which intend at initiating changes. They are eagerly waiting to find

ways to bring in changes in almost everything, if given the opportunity. The realization is that it is the people and their mindset which needs to change if anything worthwhile wants to be accomplished. The youth of today has a powerful tool in the form of technology to put into action to bring in changes. Social Media which makes intense use of technology has empowered all the enthusiastic people to initiate new ideas and thoughts which could impact the minds of people and help in bringing about changes and eventually 'Make a Difference'. Social Media are computer mediated technologies that allow the creating and sharing of information. Research shows that the audience spends 22 percent of their time on social networking sites, thus proving how popular social media platforms have become. This increase is because of the smart phones that have now become an indispensable part of the daily lives of most humans. The easy access to Social media platforms through smart devices has actually strengthened the contribution of Social media in causing a ripple effect at a fast pace and thereby playing an important and significant role in initiating and causing social change. Reading, re reading, sharing, forwarding and spreading thought provoking and brain storming messages may not show its impact immediately but somewhere over a period of time the effect and impact of the message may be seen, directly or indirectly, in the conversations, lifestyles, beliefs, attitudes and actions of people. Social Media has greatly helped in bringing people together on a common platform where ideas can be floated, opinions can be sought, thought processes ignited and people encouraged to reflect on the issues and express themselves, communicate their views as well as to a great extent influence others in forming and expressing opinions, ultimately initiate and bring in Social change. Social Media promotes awareness to users on issues that are still unknown about, makes way for meaningful conversations and empowering the people in the internet to be united and enable change in different ways that will benefit all of

us. If any medium of communication has successfully united the world under the same roof, it is the social media. It has given a tool in hands of the common people to evaluate and question their representatives as now the work of these public representatives is known to the general public. It has initiated and opened avenues for social change. This, itself is a social reform which has been fostered by the social media. Social media also alters the way we understand each other. Social media has allowed for mass cultural exchange and intercultural communication. Different cultures have different value systems, cultural themes, grammar, and worldviews, they also communicate differently. The emergence of social media platforms brought different cultures and their communication methods together, forcing them to realign in order to communicate with ease with other cultures. The speed of social media has changed the way we learn about and respond to social happenings, social and cultural issues, political, administrative and environmental concerns and natural calamities and disasters. The instant circulation of news and information has helped each one of us to be updated, much more aware, concerned about and contributive towards our social responsibilities as an active participatory citizen of the society. Bringing to the forefront such subjects and expressions of thoughts and ideas which were previously unknown and unexpressed. This has brought about a deepening of conversations and empowering citizens of the world to unite and effect change in a number of ways. The exposure gained by active participation in Social Media has inspired people to speak out their minds and give vent to their emotions and feeling and consequently take action. One of the most powerful aspects of social media is that it provides an environment, a platform and a medium for people to express themselves independently, and also find people who are likeminded or in conformance with their own thoughts and ideas which enables them to find a community comprising of people in agreement or sharing similar views. This community is as real and equally powerful as a group of people physically gathered in the same space and having similar views. It can educate people, heal many a disturbed minds and provoke change by its sheer strength of numbers. It allows the public to critically assess, discuss, evaluate and express fearlessly the social and political issues and share the news information as well as message, leading to active participation in social movements and social revolutions. Social Media has been very instrumental in spreading information, seeking people's opinions and acting as a force for change in the areas of-

1. Fighting Corruption- by monitoring effectiveness of public services, making official data available to public and highlight issues which require intervention and attention of public and authorities.
2. Creating consensus by getting e petitions signed for supporting proposals for the policy changes thereby, making the public and government think, reflect and review.
3. Tackling Health, awareness and Sanitation issues faced by the public at large. Thus drawing the attention of authorities to implement actions and bring changes.
4. Social media is playing a very positive and important role in changing the conservative mindset of the people towards gender related issues. It is sensitizing the people towards the gravity of relationships in the family, bring in social and familial connect and emotional and social needs of the society which

were gradually taking a back seat in the fast pacing, complex material and corporate world.

5. Thanks to the Social Media which has to a considerable extent been able to stimulate the humane qualities of the society and compelled people to give it a thought, if not change totally and immediately.

6. Quite unexpectedly, social media has become the strongest tool of democracy at our disposal. We're already impacting the issues of health and overall wellbeing, gender equality, sexual violence, civil rights. These issues being brought to light offer all of us the chance to educate and be educated..

7. It's not just noise. It's having a ripple effect and an impact.

8. The issues highlighted gained exposure through social media, that exposure inspired people to take action. Those taking action shared their experiences, which were amplified by social networks spreading them in solidarity. A vicious circle of action, attention and further action.

The overall impact of social media is seen in the form of change in attitudes, beliefs, values, thoughts, ideas, actions and behavior. Thus, bringing about change in the society at large.

According Factor "Change means variations from previous state or mode of existence". Change is a universal phenomenon, it is a law of nature. Society is a part of nature and thus society also changes. A static society is unthinkable. Society is constantly on the wheel of change, which may occur due to various factors like demography, ideas, values beliefs, norms, customs, attitude, and even technological advancement and innovations etc. The change of- course varies in speed and form. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces. Developmental psychology can play a role in social change. Social change comes about with tangible/intangible resource inputs as social investment. Social change refers to the change in the beliefs, values, attitude and nature of the society. These consequently lead to changes in norms, rules, regulations and systems existing in the social setup. It involves changes in the social institutions, the social behavior and the social relations among people of the society, people of the community or other social structures. It relates to changes in any event or action that affects a group of individuals that share values or characteristic features and acts of advocacy for the cause of bringing change in the society, thereby resulting in social change.

Jones' "Social change is a term used to describe variations in or modification of any aspect of social process, social patterns, social interaction or social organization." Social change is something which is gradual. It follows a process of bringing in changes in ideas, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and finally responses and actions of people in the society. And, if we reflect, Social Media has been able to make an impact on the public at large. Slowly and gradually people have started thinking, feeling and expressing their opinions as worthy citizens of the society and thereby initiating Social change. Concerns regarding the role of Social Media in Social change are varied. Social change to a great extent is a product of human mind and thinking, it restricts the implication of the tool and technology in the sense that if it is not used in the right context and frame it may prove dangerous.

- For Social Change to occur it must have wholehearted acceptance and involvement of the people. Social Media as a tool alone cannot bring in social change.

- Only if judicious and conscious use of Social Media is made, then only it will accomplish its purpose to initiate a change in the mindsets and ultimately bring about Social Change.

- Some destructive elements of the society might try to misuse the platform, thereby affecting negatively, which again is harmful in general.

Being aware of the possible misuse of social media by unscrupulous, destructive and negative elements of the society, the Government as well as other conscious and aware, contributive, positive citizens are regularly and constantly making efforts to utilize social media positively and they have come up with restrictions, rules and punitive actions against the misusers of Social Media. Collective efforts on the part of all are required to ensure that if at all Social media is being used to play an instrumental role in the society to bring about social change, then whatever is circulated in the society through social media should be in the interest of the Society as a whole and worth initiating so that it may result in bringing about positive Social Change. If we decide to put our heads together and attempt to thoughtfully harness this powerful tool. Think of the ways we could educate each other. Think of the ways we could empower people to take onus of their own activism, to actually be the change they wish to see. We can, not only include the government and bring awareness in them and educate them as well as the general public through these platforms, but we can also train others for advocacy and activism so that they can help themselves as well as work for common good and larger interests. Thus, we will be helping each other to initiate a positive change through this so powerful and impactful tool, i.e. social media. In spite of the areas of concern and caution in the role of Social Media in propelling Social Change, the ignited and aware youth and responsible citizens and authorities in the society would definitely ensure that the role of Social Media in bringing about Social Change is positive and a welcoming one.

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