



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS- SOCIAL MEDIA SCENARIO IN KERALA

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Abstract

We live in a time of social media revolution. These new forms of communication have brought about paradigm shift in the way world communities have been interacting with each other. Gathering, dissemination and exchange of information have never been this dynamic as we see in this social media driven communication context. It is incredible to witness the way social networking era has fundamentally changed the rules of communication in awe-inspiring ways. From being a mere medium to stay connected and being a source of fun and frolic, social networks have evolved over the years to become agents of social change. At a time when real time sharing of information across the globe has become an everyday phenomenon and hashtags like #MeToo are shaking systems and breaking longstanding silence, it is of utmost relevance to be talking about the impact of social media on societies and the world at large. The paper is a contextual analysis of few social media driven campaigns, which were set in the backdrops of Kerala, which evolved steadily to create history.

Key Words: Social Media, Social Movements, Social Revolution, Kerala.

Objectives of the Study

This paper on social media and social movements intends to seek answers and explanations for some crucial topics in the world of social communication today.

The Objective of the Study Is To

1. Understand the role of social media in overall societal development and as a catalyst for social change.
2. Evaluate the prospects of social media as an effective communication tool that can be utilized to bring about social change.

Methodology

The method of analysis used by the researcher for this particular instance is 'case study' method. The study encompasses a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events that happened in Kerala, the Southern state of India and their resultant impacts. The two cases studied in this paper are the situations which led to the formation of Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), post the abduction and harassment of a prominent actress in the Malayalam film industry and the much controversial Jisha murder case which made the hashtag #JusticeForJisha a trending one across all social platforms. The social networking sites considered primarily for the analysis of this study are Face book, Instagram, Whatsapp and Twitter.

Introduction

In the current context, social media touches and influences nearly every facet our personal and professional lives. It has now become imperative for these social channels to become an inseparable part of our communication strategy. With the advent of social networks, meaningful engagement, active participation and value creation has become the rules of the game. Radical shifts in social models are also happening at an unimaginable pace. Thanks to the invincible potential of these new communication tools where growth and change is real and scalable.

There have been numerous highly successful and path breaking social media campaigns that have shed light on many unacknowledged issues faced by our society and managed to trigger a whole new social movement gathering strength from the overwhelming support received from social media users cutting across all boundaries and borders. 'Arab Spring' always remains one of a kind in the way in which it managed to break all barriers of communication that existed in the region of it occurring and even resulted in civil wars questioning the system in



North Africa and Middle East. The ripples of change have had its effect worldwide and have crossed all boundaries to reach India and its diversified states as well. We have been witnessing many movements and campaigns that effectively showcased the power and metal of social networking platforms as effective tools for social change.

Social Media Scenario in Kerala

Kerala is renowned for its literacy rates and was recently in news for becoming the first digital state in the country. In February 2016, the then President Pranab Mukherjee declared Kerala as the first digital state of the country and also launched a digital empowerment campaign to develop better digital communication across the state by the year 2020.

Kerala has the outstanding track record of 100 percent mobile connectivity and has the highest record of digital banking, Aadhar card linked bank accounts and e-governance. It is also the first state to even connect its villages by broadband connections under the National Fibre Optic Network programme (N-FON). The state government also has launched the ambitious K-FON (Kerala Fibre Optic Network), which is all geared up to become a reality by 2020. The internet penetration of the state is the highest among all other Indian states the number of active social media users in the region has also been growing leaps and bounds in the recent years. The social media landscape of the state has been ever changing and multi dimensional and has been having many layers of transformation over the years.

Case One- Formation of Women in Cinema Collective and the Trending of #Avalkoppam (With Her)

At a time when the world communities are exposed to brutally honest revelations through social movements like #Me Too, the situations and context which led to the formation of Women in Cinema Collective hold utmost significance. Women In Cinema Collective (WCC) was created on May 17th 2017 in Malayalam film industry - first of its kind in India where over 1,600 films release every year. The collective was formed over a Whatsapp group, which saw some of the most powerful women in front of the camera and behind the camera came together, soon after a prominent Malayalam actress was abducted and harassed in a moving vehicle during broad daylight in Kochi. The social media movement #Avalkoppam (#WithHer) lit the virtual space by an all engulfing fire and led to many dialogues, discussions and discourse and brought about a wave of change.

Apart from anchoring the affected actor's account in a heavily contentious environment, WCC also has been successful in initiating public conversations on gender bias in cinema, misogyny in film scripts, lack of gender representation and grievance redressal systems in the film industry, disparity in pay scales etc. In less than a year since the formation, the collective managed to bring about some significant changes and start an effective dialogue on many crucial issues that have been choking the industry for ages.

1. The Government of Kerala on WCC recommendation, constituted Hema Committee to analyze prevailing gender issues in the industry and create policies to counter them.
2. In October 2018, WCC filed a PIL at the Kerala High Court, in an attempt to draw all industry bodies and individuals towards compliance of the PoSH Act, for protection of women at their workspaces. Also a WRIT was filed asking for the formation of an Internal Complaint Cell (ICC) across all organizations including A.M.M.A (Association of Malayalam Movie Artists), FEFKA (Film Employees Federation of Kerala) and MACTA (Malayalam Cinema Technicians Association).
3. A women's wing in Film Employees Federation of Kerala (FEFKA) was created as a result of constant pressure by WCC on lack of female representation in film trade associations .
4. Opened up avenues to have healthy dialogue and conversation with film fraternity and public alike on issues related to gender bias which were not previously underscored.
5. WCC also has been partnering with prominent festivals like International Film Festival Of Kerala and Kerala Literature Festival to raise awareness on issues of gender bias in cinema and the very recent MAMI festival 2018, held in Mumbai during where the members of the collective had a panel discussion on #MeToo.



What started as a simple hashtag movement online, has traveled a whole new distance to take form of a historical social movement which is now referred to as the #MeToo movement of Malayalam cinema. This clearly defines the undisputed power social networks possess as platforms of social change.

Case Two-Murder of Jisha and the Trending of #Justiceforjisha

The controversial and nerve wracking Jisha murder case was a rape and murder crime of a Dalit law student that shook the state of Kerala during April 2016 and went on to become the most publicized and talked about case of murder and rape during the Legislative elections in May 2016.

One of the most heinous and cold-blooded murder and rape cases the country has ever witnessed, the murder set in the backdrop of Kerala elections gained momentum and focus from all political parties and started numerous dialogues online. Jisha being a Dalit woman and coming from a really unfortunate family background, was brutally murdered in her home in Perumbavoor, Kerala, and the social media community of the state soon took to the online platforms with the hashtag #Justice For Jisha, demanding swift action and efforts to be taken by the authorities to quicken the efforts to bring justice to the victim. Ordinary masses, politicians, film fraternity, artists, activists and humanitarians joined the movement, making it one of the most accepted and talked about cases in the state and nationwide.

The uproar and protests that has been happening online, eventually motivated the government to structure a gender inclusive policy that halts the differentiation of people based on their gender, which creates an unhealthy stereotyped societal divide. The government also pleaded to the media to be responsible in their actions and regulate their depictions of gender negative stereotypes, which will eventually nurture and encourage gender equity. There were also instructions and regulations that were brought about and discussed to curb the pit falls of sensational yellow journalism and not to trivialize or normalize the trauma to fuel the click bait culture that is predominantly seen these days.

The unfortunate murder of the young law student also made the government to actively saddle on the implementation of alcohol prohibition in a structured manner. Muhammed Ameerul-Islam, an Assam native, the accused in the sensational Jisha rape and murder case, was given death sentence in December 2017, on account of multiple charges including rape and murder.

#Justice For Jisha soon became a hash tag synonymous to change and emphasized on the growing significance and influence social networking platforms can have on our societies, governments, systems and the world at large.

Conclusion

Social media is that one awe-inspiring communication tool that has effectively managed to remove all the walls and boundaries and bring the whole world on a single platform. It is not that the days of physical rallies, street protests and speeches offline are over. But it is highly important to recognize the fact that online movements, campaigns and ideas are transmitted at lightening pace and are reaching a wider audience real time. We have seen #MeToo becoming a global phenomenon, Nirbhaya rape case turning into a national youth movement, Anna Hazare's movement becoming a huge hit, Justice for Asifa becoming a trending hashtag, all triggered and fuelled by successful social media driven campaigns. Social media has undoubtedly given the power back to the people triggering and nurturing the truest spirit of a democracy worldwide. We can safely say that these new forms of communication have brought about a true social reform across the globe.



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