Social media a virtual platform for mobilization: study on facebook queer community pages

Debsmita Sarkar, Dr. Ayesha T. Rashid,
Research Scholar, Assistant Professor,
Department of Mass Communication,
Central University of Assam, Silchar, India

Abstract: This study investigates the role played by new media for social mobilization of queer communities around the world. A great number of researches have been found which deals with the information and communication technologies (ICT) contribution in making the communication process global. Enhancement of internet based technology tools like facebook, twitter and web 2.0 etc during the past years changed the way of sharing information on personal, professional and social level. Information technology has been acting as a catalyst for global integration. This study focuses on the newer technique of communication process to mobilize people to support and create identity by using facebook community page. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used for analyzing the data. This study sheds light on the queer community’s challenges, their demands and identity. Based on the data collected from different facebook community page this research will examine the role of social networking site in mobilizing the global mass for a common urge.

Index Terms - Social Networking Site; Community Identity; Mobilization; Queer; LGBTQ

I. INTRODUCTION

New media has changed the way of communication. Online communication has given a new direction of interacting with the world. Online communication has given rise to a new tool of communication i.e. social media or social networking sites which gave a extraordinary power to individuals and groups. This power is beneficial to many marginalized groups to share their voice with the entire world. This medium gives facility to the people who shares the same mindset, interest and believe to join a group or community pages. A proper platform is required for marginalized community to raise their voice and support any social movement or cause. Social movement of global level became easier. The new wave protest like Arab spring, a series of anti-government protests uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East in early 2011, made many researchers think and look on to the matter how social media specially facebook emerged as a platform for many popular movements. The main focus of the researcher was to know why a group of individuals decide to mobilize, many scholars have concluded that grievances alone are not enough to create movements (Buechler 2000).

As per the social movement theory the primary unit of the movement is the individual but the researcher Charles Tilly criticizes the previous thought and argues that the primary unit is the “interaction between the individuals”(Tilly, 1984) Individuals only participate in collective action when they recognize their membership in the relevant collective (Wright 2001). The degree of group identification appears to be a strong predictor of collective action participation (Stekelenburg&Klandermans 2007). Such identification can only grow out of communication between individuals (Lim 2012). Hence, it can be said that social networks as the basis for movement recruitment and the path to popular mobilization (Diani & McAdam 2003).

According to Unitarian Universalist Association groups or people with non-heterosexual orientation or all people who are marginalized on the basis of sexual orientation are known as ‘queer’ which can be a label claimed by a person who feels that they personally don’t fit into dominant norms, due to their own gender identity/expression, their sexual practices, their relationship style, etc. This term is used as an umbrella term for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Queer identities may be adopted by those who reject traditional gender identities and seek a broader, less conformist, and deliberately ambiguous alternative to the label LGBT.

New media promise new forums for the development of interest groups as well as the formation of public opinion. New media also allow dialogue between politicians and active citizens and thus it provides an arena where public discourse can take place.
and public opinion, as its function, can be formed (McQuail, 2005: 150-151). Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, Dieter Rucht in the book named ‘cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements’ mentioned that they conducted research to find out the importance and contribution of internet in social movement. More precisely the researcher critically explored, analysed and assessed the use of Information and communication technology (ICT) i.e. internet or new media. The findings suggest that ICTs are increasingly used by various social movement organizations (SMO) but the pattern and purpose of use varies in each SMO. Diverse pattern of ICT as well as SMOs should be taken into account when analyzing its use. The internet is basically used by two groups of movement structure. Firstly informal networks who want to reach large geographical area and secondly large powerful organization. Internet does not replace the traditional forms of protest i.e. rally, demonstration and collection of signatures but it facilitates this forms. Internet mobilizes the participants of the movement from and across the globe. Internet is the tool to provide information about the movement to all with less effort and money. (Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon and Dieter Rucht, 2005).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis is done using a combination of qualitative methodologies that are suitable for answering the research questions and are also appropriate to the social and cultural context. Teun A. Van Dijk introduced Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as “discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.” Critical research on discourse has the following general properties, among others: It focuses primarily on social problems and political issues rather than the mere study of discourse structures outside their social and political contexts. This critical analysis of social problems is usually multidisciplinary. Rather than merely describe discourse structures, it tries to explain them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure. More specifically, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power abuse (dominance) in society.

III. DATA COLLECTION

The objective of this study is to analyze networked communication processes, a critical discourse analysis is used to collect data on communication either written or verbal those occur in different facebook community pages, experts of LGBTQ movement, activists and sociologists. Qualitative research is used to obtain a holistic and contextualized understanding of the subject (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The use of multiple sources of evidence is convenient for developing a case study such as this, because it allows for obtaining details from different research perspectives, thus enhancing the validity of the findings (Yin, 2003).

The data from the Facebook pages of the communities were collected and analyzed for a period of one year for six communities. One day of every week, that is 4 days in a month was used as units of analysis. A total of 48 days of Facebook page activity for every sampled queer community was used. It means a total of 48x6=288 days post was analyzed made by its different members. (Pages were selected on the basis of maximum number of likes and followers. Days were randomly selected).

IV. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The researcher in this study tries to focus the virtual mass media which tries to create a platform for social mobilization of marginalized communities. SNS facebook is the mass media which has made the communication easier and effective. People are using facebook for various purposes like personal profile management, business organization, company pages, sports, religion and many more. The main area of study for this research is the various LGBTQ pages (marginalized community) who are trying to mobilize queer people to raise their voice to enjoy all the privilege and power found at the centre. The category ‘mobilizing support’ is used to find out how facebook is providing space to assemble and coordinate people for a purpose. The queer community pages are Glaad, San Diego LGBT Community Center, Familisa Trans Queer Liberation Movement, Adhikar, Nazariya and Gay rights of India. Critical discourse analysis is used to understand the post and its motive.
The members and followers of Glaad community page started mobilizing support to fight against the injustice happening with the LGBTs. When the word like ‘transgender’ are getting banned the members from Glaad community has taken initiative to start a mobilizing campaign to get a “vote against the LGBTQ erasure”. The sentence “WE WILL FIGHT BACK, WE WILL DO THIS TOGETHER GUYS!! I stand with ALL Americans in total opposition of Dump's bigotry and hatred” motivates people and makes them realize that people of America will not accept the intolerance. Mark Wurstle a follower of this community page shows his support by commenting that “I will always stand with all people who respect individual diversity and equality. As much as I and millions would like to be involved in faith, Christianity in the US is at this time an evil mechanism to spread hate and evil. This administration understands the power over weak people that christanists use and are using it against our country to create a dictatorship right before our eyes.” According to Sally Ainsworth, a member, “this is not a dictatorship, it’s a democracy. Someone stop this. It's a disease spreading and needs a shot of antibiotics to wipe it out!” Ashley Nicole Cameron added that “It's the Trump administration infringing on the equal rights of unique individuals and it's disgusting. It must be stopped! It's detrimental to the progression of our country.” Through the facebook page the community members are assembling people to stay together, to “resist the powers that seek to divide us.” Here the word ‘power’ is used to describe the ruling authority that does not support this community. “We must stand in solidarity because no one is just one identity, and many of us are under attack. All marginalized communities are under attack. The ampersand is the symbol that unites us. #WeResist!” Through this page the members are getting information that the marginalized communities are taking out rally to say no to injustice, inhuman act and suppression. Based on the feasibility people are joining the rally others are supporting the issue through comments and sharing the post with others. This online process mobilizes people not only from the same country but all over the world which becomes an example for others to raise voice online or offline. The post “Texas Gov. Abbott has called on a special discriminatory session that will target transgender people, making it illegal for them to access facilities that match their gender identity. Add your name now to tell Texas legislators stop targeting transgender” shows the mobilizing process of online communities to raise voice against the discrimination. The phrase ‘add your name’ asserts the formation of assembling and coordination of likeminded people to decline power abuse. Sometime clicking ‘like’ also shows support for the community for example the post “Target is being replaced by a ‘Resist March’.” The facebook page San Diego LGBT community centre mobilizes people to join #Equality March in support of LGBT people. This page is giving a chance to join the rally virtually for Unity and Pride, through live video. The page also shares that “LA Pride Parade Is Being Replaced By A ‘Resist March’”. The creator of the facebook page invites all members who from and outside the community to take part in the march. The name ‘resist march’ depicts that the main agenda of the march is to resist the forces that would divide the community and resist those who would take away their liberty. The page is also opposing ‘conversion therapy’, the pseudoscientific practice of trying to change an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual using psychological or spiritual interventions. There is virtually no reliable evidence that sexual orientation can be changed and medical body warns that conversion therapy practices are ineffective and potentially seriously harmful (Wikipedia). The page writes ‘Join us to say no to conversion therapy!’ These show the process of mass activation for resisting the practice. Through facebook page the San Diego LGBT community centre invites people to be present physically for a march to “resist marginalization of anyone”.

Mobilizing people, members or followers of the page became easier as the page owner of “Familisaa: Trans Queer Liberation Movement” posts the link where the supporters can do digital signature to support a cause i.e. “Help us get to 100,000 signatures tonight - demand that Members of Congress and Attorneys General come out in favor of #DACA#HereToStay”. This became less time consuming. The sentence from the post “Join the rally today in LA to demand ICE #FreeTeresa!” showcases the pursuasion and mobilizing action of the page by asking people to gather for a common agenda. The word ‘join us’ in the post is used to invite or influence people to associate and assemble together to fight for the rights. Rallies are most common form of mobilizing people
and it has a great impact on the minds of the people. The post “Los Angeles marches for crossroads to Black Trans Liberation” is posted on the timeline of the page to make people aware that they are taking out rallies to support black transgender. Readers of the post will have an impact on their mind to understand the problem of the community and help them in all possible ways. The prior information about the rally on facebook page i.e. “Rally at the detention center in DTLA to demand not one more deportations!” will attract more supporters to walk for a cause. The facebook page is a platform to earn support from the society. The post on 25th may 2017 about gang rape and acid attack survivor is an archetype to understand the power of facebook to gather support for a particular cause. Through facebook page and its hyperlinked webpage the victim has earned huge amount for treatment. LGBTQ Pride parade is another platform where the community from all over the country participate to share experience, raise voice to earn equality in heterosexual society and demand betterment for future. The members and supporters of the community who were not able to participate physically are joining the parade through live video of facebook. Facebook has also provided technique of adding comment on the live video. A post on 24th January articulates the pride parade from Mumbai with a live video.

The community pages discourse analysis clearly depicts that the LGBTQ community is raising voice to gain acceptance within the society. A single person’s voice will remain unheard therefore they are mobilizing the people who belong to the community and the supporters of the community. By using facebook community page many people around the world is lending their voice to establish the identity of this community. Without being physically present in any rally or march mobilization can happen virtually.

It is found that 62 out of the total posts are uploaded to directly mobilize people and they are getting success because after reading the post they too are sharing the post and commenting. From that more people are getting enlighten and changing their view towards the marginalized community. They are also writing and saying to the government to legalize same sex marriage, to give space to come out of the closet and rights in front of the world. It clearly concludes that facebook community page is a successful medium for mobilization.

REFERENCES

http://www.emilypost.com/communication-and-technology


