

Citizen Journalism as a Platform for Storytelling through Social Media: Jallikattu protest in Tamilnadu

(*Hemamalini Sambasivam, Alagan Chandran, & Sasikaladevi Shanmugasundaram)

1. *Bharathidasan University, Assistant Professor, Department of Visual Communication, Thiru. Vi. Ka Government Arts College, Tiruvarur, Tamilnadu, India.
2. Bharathidasan University, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Thiru. Vi. Ka Government Arts College, Tiruvarur, Tamilnadu, India.
3. Madras University, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Presidency College, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Social media has paved way for many positive trends. In recent days it plays an important role in disseminating information by anyone from anywhere across the globe. With the onset of the development in mobile technology and internet usage, the use of social media has been witnessed to a greater extent in Tamilnadu. The Chennai floods in 2015, Vardah cyclone in 2016 and the famous Jallikattu protest in 2017, at Chennai, Tamilnadu found the emancipation in using the social media to gather the masses in supporting and organising reliefs, funds and protests. This study tries to see the phenomenology of events during the Jallikattu protest. The study is divided into three phases, pre-protest phase, on-going protest phase and the pro-protest phase. Case study was adapted to find the effect of social media usage during all the three phases. The results reveal the fact that social media as a great channel that could be utilised to bring forth an united effort to overcome the challenges faced by the country. The happenings are in the form of digitised stories that attracts the audience either to entertain or debate on. It is a tool of the hour to disseminate information to the masses in order to gather a likeminded gesture towards an issue. Social media is found to play the role of the opinion leader where the dominant paradigm theoretical perspective is adapted.

Keywords

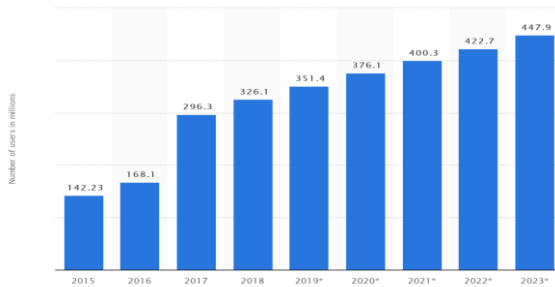
Jallikattu, Citizen journalism, Social media, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp

1. Introduction

Citizen journalism provides a platform for ordinary people to exhibit their interest, thoughts and ideologies which were done by professionals alone. Stories happening around a locality is focused by a layman who gives views and suggestion on the event. It is revealed in a storytelling pattern to lure the audience interests. Jay Rosen (1999), stated that "citizen journalists were the people once known as the audience, who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another - and who today were not in a situation like that at all." Further the launch of Jio network in 2017, enabled less expensive internet connections to become less expensive leading to proliferation of internet usage deep down the grass roots through mobile technology. Youtube videos of interesting stories, issues or happenings are captured, shared and commented through social media which at times also finds place in the main stream media. Today's mobile communication leads to a state where anything that is shared or posted is immediately known to others at a faster pace irrespective of any geographical area or the issue. This immediate news given by common people is made possible by the advanced technologies and communication platforms they use in disseminating information. Social media thus becomes a platform of exhibiting journalistic skills by anyone who wants to carry the issue forward. Bowman and Willis (2003) define, "Citizen Journalism as the act of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating and information". According to a report stated in statista.com for the month of February 2019, it is found that there is a drastic increase in usage of social medial every year.

Figure 1

Number of social network users in India from 2015 to 2023 (in millions)



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278407/number-of-social-network-users-in-india/>

This amazing growth in the use of social media has brought enormous result in the information sharing and individuals participating in social media agitation, protests, acknowledging the posts and commenting any issue on the roll. Facebook pages, Tweets from Twitter, Whatsapp messages and youtube videos find a diffusing role in spreading the information.

2. Need for Study

Technological advancements created both positive and negative impact among the masses. Specifically, youngsters have been bombarded with hi-tech environment, where there are many chances to incur into negative results. Mobile technology and its growth have seen an immeasurable reach in the society, impacting the notions of the people. The feasibility of mobile technology to all walks of life, increased the freedom to speak and share in online spaces at a great pace. Even at individual level, people have started to share or preach their ideas, thoughts, suggestions and even more take decisions authoritatively through social media. Every day the facebook page or the twitter comes out with news in the form of stories, a new form of digitised journalism where storytelling is the requirement of the journalist.

Use of this communication medium has become a day to day activity without which digital media communication would not have developed to this extent. Hence, the power and effect of immediacy of this medium along with its relevance to the society need to be studied to validate social media as a definite tool to address the masses. However, certain events as Chennai floods in 2016, Vardah cyclone in 2017, hashtags after Delhi rape incident, and others have positively revealed the role of social media and its effect. Jallikattu has gone a further step in disseminating news to the masses with all its social relevance, thereby organising a mass gathering at one specific place.

3. Background of the Study

The information and news that was flowing down in the social media during the Jallikattu protests have confirmed the fact that journalism has been taken further to a greater level across the global scenario. The news disseminated through social media progressive during the protest period is found to be unbiased and impartial.

The Pongal festival celebrated in Tamilnadu usually gears up with a bull sport named Jallikattu. In 2017, as Pongal festivities was nearing, the significance of cultural sport and its benefits surfaced the online spaces in promotion of Jallikattu. It was shared through Facebook groups, twitter hashtags that was commented and followed by masses all over the world. The protest reached its peak when #SaveOurCultureJallikattu surfaced the social media as on 18th January 2017. The first hashtag on this issue was #WeDoJallikattu that was initiated on 7th January 2017, spreading awareness on the bull sport and voicing its support for the sport. Some of the other hashtags which were tweeted during the protests were #IsupportJallikattu, #JusticeForJallikattu, #MarinaProtest and #WeDidJallikattu. It can be witnessed that though Facebook and Twitter were the platforms in creating and organising the protest, Whatsapp had played an important role in sharing the information every moment to the masses, creating an oneness among the people who supported the issue.

4. Objectives

- To find out how social media promotes citizen journalism.
- To find out if citizen journalism content is gaining more popularity among the audience than mainstream news products.
- To analyse the reach of social media among the masses

5. Literature Review

Newman (2009) stated that social media and user-generated content were fundamentally changing the nature of breaking news. Kperogi (2011) observed that while the vigorous profusion of web-based citizen media had the potential to inaugurate an era of dynamic expansion of the deliberative space and even serve as a counterfoil to the domination of the discursive space by the traditional media, a trend was being witnessed towards the aggressive co-optation of these citizen media by corporate media hegemons. Vanderwagen (2012) studied the impact of Twitter, that challenged the mainstream journalism. Citizen journalists utilised Twitter to break and create news in South Africa and globally, resulting in a shift in the way journalists would source and distribute news. Xin (2010) came up with a similar finding that citizen journalism was used by mainstream media as a news source or an alternative channel for distributing politically sensitive information, which showed that citizen journalists could work effectively together with mainstream media to expose social injustice cases. In India a case study was done by Kaveri Devi Mishra and Sridhar Krishnaswami (2014) on the citizen journalism in Delhi where they identified that citizen journalists raised their voice to bring in change in the law women safety. Ongoing studies are on citizen journalism in various parts of the country could be traced in future.

6. Methodology

Case study has been adopted to study the rise of citizen journalism in Tamilnadu during the Jallikattu protests. Hartley (2004) states that case study research "consists of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context," with the aim being "to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied". This definition reasons out to choose case study as the research methodology for this study. In this study the protest that was initiated, organised, followed and propagated through the social media by common people across the state and also supported throughout the world need to be analysed. A coding sheet which explained the social media activities during all the three phases of the protest were coded and interpreted to answer the objectives of the study. 3 twitter pages which were #Jallikattu, #JusticeForJallikattu, #MarinaProtest, and 3 Facebook pages "I Support Neduvasa" with 507,834 followers; "Jallikattu.in" with 24,938 followers, "Jallikattu Veeravilayatu" with 393,438 members following this page were taken for the study. 3 Whatsapp groups which catered to college students, general teacher groups (2) and media teacher group in which the researchers were members were taken for study.

7. Role of Social Media in Pre-Protest Phase of Jallikattu

In January 7, 2017 a hashtag #WedoJallikattu was created against the ban of Jallikattu a cultural bull sport which was held in Alanganallur, Madurai in Tamilnadu during the Pongal festival. The posts in twitter and Facebook was not confined to the slogan "we need Jallikattu" alone but stated reasons for supporting the bull sport. The ban on Jallikattu was claimed to eliminate the rural cow breed, to regain the Tamil identity, to voice their protest against foreign vested interests and corporatisation. Tweets and posts illustrated the need of solidarity among the masses. The easy process of operating the mobile phones such as sharing the messages that they accept ideologically led to the pre-protest phase victory.

Social media was witnessed to carry heaps of information to the masses about the heredity and traditional values of the bull taming sports. Rallies, protests and the exact conditions prevailing at every nook and corner of the state was known through social media. Before the main media was able to identify the actual situation, Whatsapp, Facebook pages and Tweets came out with the veracity of the situations. Visit of film personalities, the denial of youngsters to take film personalities or the politicians support for the cause, the oneness of the gathering, a calm but the strong unity of the crowd, the speciality of the protests without an identified leader and the reporting of slogans, distribution of food, water and snacks during the protest were reported with photographs, videos, audio and memes. These attributes where individual people shared and reported, catered to the concept of citizen journalism that is witnessed during the jallikattu issue.

Figure 2

#Jallikattu – Tweeted 600000 as on January 20, 2017



Source: <https://www.news18.com/news/india/how-social-media-powered-jallikattu-protests-1338635.htm>

The data on twitter substantiates the reach of social media to different parts of the world and also determines the participation of users from wide creed and culture. The utilisation of social media in the initial stages was only minimal. It is

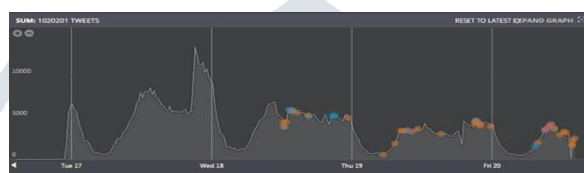
found that sharing the voices of support was the prominent phenomena visualised during the initial stages, that is from January 7, 2017. In due course posts and tweets followed with various opinions carrying forward the reasons to support Jallikattu. It could be found that social media which was already witnessed to be a powerful medium to organise or initiate relief measures during the Chennai floods and Vardah cyclone in earlier years have been utilised to organise this marina protest.

The tweets between January 17, 2017 to January 20, 2017 in #jallikattu was identified to be increasing, since these days a huge gathering was on the marina seashore, who were seen tweeting every second. People who went to marina, to witness the gathering too, took a selfie and posted to mark that they were also in the protest spot to support the cause.

#JusticeForJallikattu catered to support the natural breed and the positive agenda of our tradition and culture. The negative concepts of corporatisation during what were commented and tweeted. Further, the need and right to support Jallikattu was initiated by this hashtag, where the increased tweets was found to be high on January 18, 2017 and a decrease was found for the days preceding as well as the following days.

Figure 3

#JusticeForJallikattu tweeted a million times as on January 20, 2017



Source: <https://www.news18.com/news/india/how-social-media-powered-jallikattu-protests-1338635.html>

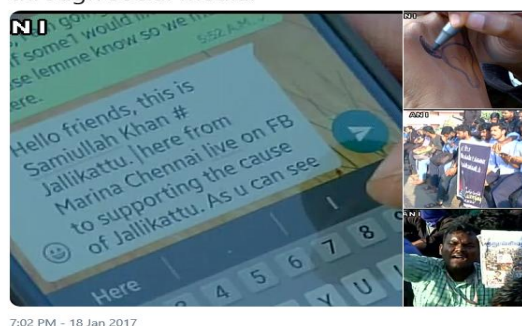
8. Role of Social Media During the Protests and Pro-Protest Phase

Ideologies of individual persons were highlighted through the dialogues posted and shared through social media. The search and claim for one's own identity and rights could be seen to be emphasised by youngsters through social media. At the outset, many creative slogans followed by memes supporting the issue surfaced social media. Some tweets could be identified to criticise the protest, but those criticisms were not debated, instead ignored and the major target to support the sport was continuously propagated.

Figure 3

Image of Whatsapp used during pro-protest in ANI twitter page

#Jallikattu supporters in large numbers at Chennai's Marina Beach garner support through social media.



7:02 PM - 18 Jan 2017

People from various places posted the protest conditions, rallies undertaken with photographs. Visual representations were found to flood the social media. Reporting of every activity could be seen publicised and updated. Mobile was the important medium of communication during Jallikattu. Factual and present news have found place through social media. Journalistic ethics were also not violated in representing the happenings by a common man. Social media involvement was categorised and coded various positive and negative aspects.

The protest organised by youngsters were supported through social media by film and sports personalities, and many social interest business people. The news and information shared through media based on social media updates led to massive one day closure of shops and organisations during the protest period thereby the pro-protest phase was highly acknowledged by the people.

It can be noted down that social media content that was shared on information of corporatisation, foreign vested product consumption, the quality of native breed and its extinct the main stream media was forced to discuss and debate on these issues.

Table 1
Coding sheet of the case study

Sl. No	Coded	Particulars
1.	Tamil Culture / heritage / tradition	Identity of Tamilian such as "We are Tamilians save our culture"; "Join hands to save our tradition";
2.	Corporatisation	PETA is a corporate organisation; ban Pepsi and coca cola; All corporates are behind banning our interests
3.	Rural breed	Information on native breed, its healthy benefits, the count of native breeds and their way of handling, need for bull sport to nurture the native breed.
4.	Support for Protest	Propagating, calling, posting pics of their participation in Marina.
5.	Support for food and other accessories	Individual contributions as well as asking for required materials were coded.
6.	Supporting PETA and ban on Jallikattu	Posts and tweets mentioning death of people during this taming of bulls, the negative result of allowing bull fight.

Memes, youtube videos and information to stop using beverages such as Pepsi, Coca Cola was initiated and many shop owners and hotel authorities put up board stating henceforth they would not sell such beverages. Traditional sports and dances like Silambam, Karagam, were enacted by the protestors and shared through social media. Evidence of minute by minute reporting of the happenings around the world regarding Jallikattu were posted and commented throughout the week.

Rallies following the marina protest was updated through social media from various other places of Tamilnadu. Whatsapp played the role of sharing and propagating the issue to a greater extent, in which each person involved in the Jallikattu issue took the role of a citizen journalist. Videos, Audios, Images in the form of memes, illustrations were shared to emphasize the reason and output of the protests. Many mainstream media had accepted the fact that social media had indeed changed the style of reporting.

The below given figure represents the essence of social media and its role during the Jallikattu protest by the main stream media.

Figure 4

Title of articles mentioning role of social media in Jallikattu protest.

- [Jallikattu protests: How social media engineered a revolution in ...](http://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/230117/jallikattu)
www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/230117/jallikattu ...
The protests for Jallikattu are another example of how social media has forever changed the social and political discourse in India.
- [With Social Media, Jallikattu Protest On Chennai's Marina Beach ...](http://www.ndtv.com)
www.ndtv.com > Tamil Nadu ...
Thousands, gathered since Tuesday night at Chennai's Marina Beach, have refused to leave till the ban on Jallikattu is lifted and want the government and courts to listen to their demands, saying ...
- [Six reasons why Chennai's Jallikattu Protest at Marina Beach is ...](http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2017/jan/18/six-reasons...)
www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2017/jan/18/six-reasons...
With no single organiser or a political party back up, and social media being one of the strongest points, the Jallikattu protest at Marina is unique for more than one reasons.
- [A Look at How Social Media Powered Jallikattu Protests](http://www.news18.com)
www.news18.com > India ...
A Look at How Social Media Powered Jallikattu Protests The youth of an entire state are clamouring for the right to conduct a traditional sport that half of them have only seen on television.

9. Conclusion

Citizen journalism through social media is easy to access, share and is also followed by various people around the globe. Since this medium offers its audience the opportunity to participate in the discussion and give views on the post or tweet, the users of social media tend to be attracted towards the news or media content given here. The popularity of tweets and facebook pages are highlighted in the mainstream media thereby adding to the value of the posts. Since the content of citizen journalist in the social media could be always debated by variety of people of interests on the issue, it has more advantage in determining the course of the issue. Issues, propaganda and the support are instilled through different opinions of the layman in the form of stories that lured the interests of the Jallikattu audience and its supporters. Each and every day from January 7 2017 to January 25^h 2017, the social media was flooded with different angles of news in the form of stories that emancipated the individual views to the mass audience.

In this particular issue the reach of social media was evidenced by the large group of gatherings and the issue being dealt and sorted out by the then Tamilnadu chief minister O. Paneerselvan, who brought the issue to an end. Many newspapers and media have reflected their consent over the major role played by the social media towards Jallikattu.

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