

THE EMERGING ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF BURMA

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ABSTRACT: *The current study aims to investigate the impact of social media on social change of Burma. It is a deductive study in which cross-section survey designed was chosen to collect the data. An online survey instrument was generated by the research for data collection. Due to the shortage of time and resources the instrument was attached to the most popular social sites of Burma like; 7Day News Journal, Eleven Media Group & BBC Burmes. These sites were selected due to their wide access range in Burma and highest number of followers. In total 338 samples were collected after the deduction of missing values and outliers, 314 samples were declared valid for further analysis. Majority of the respondents were young male having bachelor degree education. Data was analyzed through SPSS 21.0 for windows. The results show that overall, mean value was in between 2.3-3.92 and standard deviation in between 1.06-2.21. Cronbach alpha was conducted to examine item's internal consistency, overall reliability was found 0.81. Both hypotheses were accepted. This study finds that social media has significant and positive impact on social change. This study was not free from the limitations. Future research can be conducted on longitudinal method; broadcast as well as print media can also be examined.*

KEYWORDS: Social media, Social change, Burma

INTRODUCTION

In universe, only change is the permanent thing. It prevails in every society of the world, especially it is dominated in the society which desires to satisfy the public or fulfill their needs. A society requires change as it can transmit the old procedures into new one (Nworah, 2005). The world has seen different kinds of changes or shifts. These shifts might be; from rural to urban, agriculture to industries, regions to states, dictatorship to democracy and north to south. These changes have been observed, almost every sector of human life like; economy, living style, education, culture, politics, behavior, attitude, family structure etc. Burma's society has also witnessed these changes since independence but the irony is that, the common has not been benefited completely by all these changes due to the chronic hitches by the state authorities.

The changes in social process are simply known as social change. It is a modification or variation in any facet of social form, process or pattern. Besides, it is the variation in conducts and established process of social web or relations (Lauer, 1982, p.4). Olagbaju (2015) argues that social change is a fundamental shift in the social structure which is already established. In addition, Moore (1967) explains social change as a form of social actions like; values, norms and culture. Social change is undeniable in any society and it is produced by various variables.

According to Olagbaju (2015) there are numerous factors which affects social change but the most prominent are human inter-action (communication) and patriotic leadership. Language or people's contact are also considered essential for social change because it is a compound of commitment and co-operation of all those who are beneficiaries of this change. Burma's life is a multitude of social change. The variables which are affecting social change in Burma might be internal as well as external. Social scientist and international research institutes have examined these changes through various variables like; fragile democracy, poverty, ethnic issues, military dominance, education, economic crisis, lack of contact with international community, political participation, lack of public trust and many more. Existing literature suggests that since 2011, social media is playing a significant role in changing the social patterns in Burma. Before going in detail, we must understand the term "social media" and conditions of media in Burma.

Social media is a term which defines an informative and social platform that consists on different webs, technologies and applications. It facilitates people to connect each other online (i-e Youtube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, etc). This rapid emergence of social media has started scholarly debate about the consequences and impact of social media on human attitude and society. Globally, social media is playing a dynamic role in organizing the public, against any unhappy incident or government policies. It invigorates the social movements and shares the uncensored information to the people. During the last decade, social media has played a major role in changing the scenario of different societies. Notably, election protest in Iran 2009, political revolution in Maldives 2009, Haiti earthquake 2010, where social media played a marvelous role in connecting and uniting the people in the conditions of crisis. Additionally, the role of social media also got attention during the recent Arab uprising and military failure revolt in Turkey. Besides, in the general election of Singapore (2011), Pakistan (2013) and recent presidential election of USA (2016) the tool of social media was widely used by different political parties. This platform is used to get authentic and quick information about any happening and location of hospitals during any dangerous situation. This tool is increasing awareness among the masses to help or condemn any action or cause. Sheedy (2011) claims, for the first time in human history, everyone became a journalist. Notwithstanding, this tool of communication remains contentious since its birth, because authoritarian rulers, governments and institutions have tried to curtail the freedom of social media or sought to regulate or control this platform whenever it threatens to their status quo or lead a debate about the malfunction of institutions, corruption and transparency. Social media is facing different kind of limitations and hurdles in the various regions or states of the modern world, Burma is one of them. Following section briefly highlights the woeful plight of the media in Burma.

Status of media in Burma: Republic of the Union of Myanmar with its diverse ethnicity, political, economical, cultural and social complexion is an interesting case in Southeast Asia. Since the birth of Myanmar, public enjoyed democratic values only for 12 years because in 1962 General Ne Win declared martial law in the country. During the entire military regime, media remained dormant and strictly controlled by the government authorities until 2011. Military rule did not only violate the human rights and democratic values but also media freedom was brutally curtailed. Burma remained one of the isolated and impoverished countries during this rule. Many journalists were killed and imprisoned by the state. Additionally, government suppressed several pro-democratic and social movements.

The status of media shows how the youth in a time of globalization and modernization strived to find their identity and notion of citizenship, freedom of expression and social interactions that is not only technological but constitutional right of them.

During the 1988's uprising media regulations were somehow relaxed but not completely relaxed. All broadcasting and daily newspapers were directly or indirectly censored during military regime, other publications had to get approval through Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) prior to be published. For the first time, weekly and monthly private journal were allowed to publish in 1990, but it was declared to the journals that any political or governmental topic will not be published. After one decade (2000), first news journal was permitted.

The isolated country Burma hit by calamitous Cyclone "Nargis" in May, 2008. Although it was devastating one (approximately 140,000 people were killed) but the door for the international community was opened during this Cyclone. This development gradually helped non-governmental group, civil society and media institutions to groom up. In the result of this indirect involvement of international media, Burma's media saw a potential change when civilian government was installed. Over the time, this sector strengthened itself slowly and gradually for the greater freedom of expression and media. During the entire struggle of media freedom in Burma, the international media agencies and satellite broadcasters (British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio free Asia and Voice of America) played a significant role. Media landscape in Burma has become stronger with the introduction of mobile phones and internet. Until 2011, social media was used by the youth through proxies because most of the popular social sites were banned by the government. According to the Weekly Eleven Journal (September, 2011) ban over 30,000 websites has been lifted by the government including; social media sites. Although the civilian government has recently changed the policies regarding the media censorship but the rural areas of the country are still waiting for media penetration and internet access. The civilian government is pledging to wash away these hurdles within couple of years. Despite of the fact, there are visible and durable barrier are present in the way of social media but the youth in urban areas of the country prefers social media to express their ideas and to share information. Besides young people of the urban areas; this platform is also providing due space to the journalists, organizations, government ministers, public figures, celebrities and those who have internet access. Published literature suggests that social media has become mainstream platform where broader range of topics are being discussed by the public more openly than ever. Brooten (2016) declares this as a positive and significant change in the Burma's society but he also expects from social media to fulfill the remaining gap between civil society and media.

This paper is an attempt to examine the role of social media in social change. In the upcoming section extensive literature review has been given, which highlights the role of social media in modern world and the importance of this tool of communication, followed by research methodology and data analysis. In the end, findings and suggestions of the study are described.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term "social change" has an immense umbrella to comprehend the fundamental and civic outcomes. These outcomes are the result of growing awareness, behavioral change, increased understanding, participation and change in policies that are constituted to correct injustice. It

starts from the individuals and engulfs groups, institutions, community and by this way the entire society colored by it. Social change has been examined in every time and in every region of the world. Existing literature witnessed that there are many factors that may affect the social change. According to Olagbaju (2015) it appears through the contacts of language and culture with other societies. He further explains that with the contacts of two or more than two societies, their cultures, languages, beliefs and values are exchanged. Some time a society left its impact to the others and some time it borrows different traits from others. Dike (2008) defines that the social change is totally dependent on the way in which leader mobilized the resources. Likewise, it is the public attitude towards change that brings the change in the society (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Adversely, Lauer (1982) argues that social change cannot be occurs through any one factor but many variables involves into it. According to the findings of his study, social structure, cultural factors, values and attitudes, population change, technological factors and physical environment are the main factors which bring change in the society. On another place Olagbaju (2015) declares language as the powerful and unique tool behind the social change. In addition, he says it is the language that exposes different cultures and norms of the society. Besides, many social scientists claim that industries and technology is playing vital role in social change (Zhuo *et al.*, 2011). Social communication technology enables people across the world to connect and create their independent communities from their own location (Harasim, 1993). The social community which is developed through social media is far above from the geographical sphere (Meyrowitz, 1985). Social media helps people to mobilize and coordinate, it has changed the way of communication and it engage people in religious, political, economical, cultural, entertain mental, and social dialogues (Seib, 2008). It was the social media and modern communication technology which fueled the uprising in Northern African countries (Seib, 2008; Campbell, 2011). The power of social media can be measured through the actions embattled leaders took against it during the Arab uprising (Zhou *et al.*, 2011). Social media is a tool of “interaction between social context, political purpose and technological possibility” (Gillan, *et al.*, 2008: 151). The platform of social media is helpful in connecting many-to-many, many-to-one and one-to-one. Additionally, the ability of social movement can be increased through social media by linking one movement to other organizations and in the result a wide network of the people developed (Akashraj *et al.*, 2014). This newly generated platform of social media is not only to share the information or connect the people but this is a vibrant weapon to defend the ideology and it can be used against the ideological enemies as well (Jordan and Taylor, 2004). Several scholars finds social media as a strong factor for political and regime changes. The histrionic impact of Panama Leaks and Wiki Leaks in world politics, Tahrir Square, Occupy movement, usage of social media in recent election campaigns in Malaysia are the significant example of the role played by social media in political change (Shirky, 2011; Jones, 2011; Anderson, 2011; & Harb, 2011). The link between politics and social media was also examined by Kasoma, (1995) and Fiske, (1996). Many researchers like; Ito, (2010); Livingstone, (2008); Knobel and Lankshear, (2007); Jenkins *et al.* (2006) and Prensky, (2001) argued that there is a strong link between the behavior of the young and social media. The political interest among the young has been increased with the advent of Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Wikis, Blogs etc (Loader, 2007; & Jenkins *et al.*, 2006). Hence, it is apparent in the published literature that social media has a strong connection with the behavioral, political, social and cultural change. Van Laer *et al.* (2010) opine that it was the social media that informs outside the world about the brutalities, ethnic crises, and undemocratic norms of the isolated Burma.

Contrarily, many studies find negative impact of social media on the attitude of the young and social norms. According to Sheedy (2011) the information which is being spread through social

media is lacking the authenticity. In other words it can be say that rumors or misinformation is mainly spreading through social media. In this way, numerous social scientists praise the ability of social media to connect and reach masses across the globe, but they are not fully satisfied with the ability of social media that compels people to take action. This argument is not new one Lazarfeld and Merton (1996) finds that social media is a major cause which aware the people about a particular topic or subject but no any action is being taken practically. They further argue that no social change is developed by the social media but it helps to apply the existing values in the society. Likewise, others find minimal effects of social media in society. According to their argument, social change comes on the ground by the people because social change needs strong social ties, while social media create merely weak ties (Gladwell, 2010).

According to the theory of ties (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1365) weak ties can help friends to transfer knowledge and to find a job, while these are only strong ties, in which people can trust each other. Strong ties affect; emotions, desires, feelings and it unites people in a time of crisis. This claim of strong and weak ties rejected by McPherson *et al.*, (2015), According to the findings of their study it is not about strong or weak ties, it is all about availability and access. They further argue that there are so many people around the world that have no one, whom they discuss and share important matters as well as their personal feelings. This argument is supported by Mainwaring (2011), he claims social media minimize the barrier of activism and it provides a platform where people can exchange their thoughts and ideas easily and openly without any kind of state limitations. The effect of this platform is much important for society. Shirky (2009, p. 23) defines the effect of this communication tool in this way, “social media provides group action that gives human society its particular character, and anything that changes the way groups get things done will affect society as a whole”. It might be these words of Shirky that compel Brooten, (2016) to say that the hope for the democratic Burma lies in social media. Akashraj (2014) opines that the coming decade is very important for human society as well as nations.

Thus, the impact of social media on social change varies from state to state or region to region, it may be due to the socio-demographic difference, different facilities and access to internet. No doubt social media is a transparent mood of communication but it is difficult to say either it has positive or negative impact on change in society. Therefore, the idea to examine the role of social media in social change has been chosen. The researcher claims, on the basis of reviewed literature that, the role of social media in Burma’s society has been severely ignored.

Objectives of the study

This study objects to investigate;

- 1) The role of social media in social change in Burma
- 2) The impact of social media in the society of Burma

Hypothesis

H1: There is significant and positive role of social media in social change.

H2: There is significant and positive impact of social media in the society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive in nature, a cross sectional survey was conducted in order to collect the data. Literature witnessed that, to measure the impact, human behavior and attitude, deductive method is authentic one (Lianjiang, 2013). Therefore, deductive method was adopted in this study. For this purpose, a survey questionnaire was adopted from the literature. The survey questionnaire has been widely used by many social scientists in the different regions of the world.

Survey instrument and sampling procedure:

As it is already described, a close-ended instrument for data collection was adopted not developed. The questionnaire was developed online by the researcher which consists of five point Likert scales. In order to make the questionnaire more understandable, simple language was used. Due to the lack of time and resources, questionnaire was attached to the most popular social sites of Burma such as; *7Day News Journal* which has 11543451 followers, *Eleven Media Group* which is a wide social platform having 10,605884 members and *BBC Burmes* having 8228811 fans. Globally, many research organizations and institutions are using this type of method for data collection. At the main page of the instrument, respondents were informed about their voluntarily participation. They were also informed that they can withdraw from the survey whenever they want. Out of total distributed questionnaire only 338 questionnaires were returned back. The received data was analyzed through SPSS 21.0 for windows.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demography of the respondent

Demographic results of the study shows that out of 338 respondents, male participants were in majority 67.16% (n= 227) and participation of the female respondents was in minority 32.84% (n=111). In respect of the age of the participants, results highlights that the young people have 21- 40 years of age were in the majority 72% (n=244) while the second largest participation was of those people who were in between 41-60 years 18.12% (n=18). The minority of the respondent were above 60 years 9.88% (n=33). In regard to the educational background of the respondents, it was found that majority of the respondents have bachelors degree 58.57% (n=198), participants who have masters degree were the second highest majority 26.33% (n=89) while 13.90% (n=47) of the respondent have not even bachelors. The minority of the participants were those who, having M.Phil/PhD degree 1.18% (n=04).

Data Cleaning

Before conducting factor analysis, missing values and outliers were cleaned through (SPSS) version 21.0. Out of 338 samples, seven (7) were removed as they were not completely filled. Moreover, Mahalanobis's distance test and standardized z score tests were performed in-order to detect the outliers (uni and multivariate) (Hair *et al.*, 2006). In the results of these tests, seventeen (17) samples were detected as their standardized z scores was ($\pm \geq 2.5$), outliers (extreme and mild) and D^2/df value transcend 2.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2006). After that, 314 samples were declared valid for further analysis.

Descriptive and reliability assessment

To investigate participant's response and trends, different statistical tests were performed. The results reveal the Mean value in between 2.3– 3.92 and standard deviation in between 1.06– 2.21. Cronbach's alpha was conducted in-order to examine item's internal consistency. The overall reliability was noticed 0.81, which is, according to George and Mallery, (2003) is an excellent one. Additionally, factor's individual reliability was also satisfactory.

Hypotheses testing

Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relations and impact of variables. For *H1* result found ($r=.356^{**}$) (see further; Table: 01). Pearson's correlations results suggest that there is significant and positive role of social media in social change. Therefore, *H1* was accepted. For *H2* result was ($r=.367^{**}$) (for detail; Table: 01). The results highlights that there is significant and positive impact of social media in the society. Hence, *H2* was also accepted.

In short, two out of two hypotheses were accepted. In addition, Table: 02 below, extensively describes the hypotheses testing.

Table: 01 Pearson's Correlation

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	SOCH	---					
2	SOME	.356**	---				
3	SOCI	.367**	.453**	--			
4	AGE	.201*	.339**	.301**	--		
5	GEND	.420**	.401**	.289**	.035	--	
6	EDUC	.359**	.521**	.489**	.321**	.034	--

Note: SOCH= Social change; SOME= Social media, SOCI= Society, GEND= Gender, and EDUC= Education

Table: 02. Summary of Hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Description	Result
<i>H1</i>	There is significant and positive role of social media in social change.	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>H2</i>	There is significant and positive impact of social media in the society.	<i>Accepted</i>

CONCLUSION

In-order to examine the impact of social media in social change in isolated society of Burma, this study was conducted. This was a deductive study in which, data was collected on cross-

sectional survey design. For this purpose, an online research instrument was generated, after that it was linked with most popular social sites in Burma (i-e; *7Day News Journal, Eleven Media Group & BBC Burmes*). These sites were selected due to their huge amount of followers and due to their wide range inside Burma. After data was collected, it was analyzed through SPSS 21.0 for windows. The results suggest that majority of the respondents were male (67%), in regards to the age, results reveal that majority was of young respondents (72%) in between 21-40 years. Those who have bachelor degree were in majority (58.57%) when analyzed about the educational background. Out of total 338 samples 314 were finalized for further analysis after examining the missing values and outliers. Overall, mean value was found in between 2.3-3.92 and standard deviation in between 1.06-2.21. Cronbach alpha was conducted to examine item's internal consistency, overall reliability was found 0.81. Both hypotheses were accepted.

The study finds that there is significant and positive impact of social media on social change. The study has certain kind of limitations such as; it was cross-sectional study, data was collected through online instrument due to the shortage of resources and time, the role of broadcast and print media can also be examined.

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