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## The Power of Social Networking: A Case Study of Patidar Anamat Andolan

### Abstract :

*It is hard to imagine life without internet for many of us. But some 6.3 million residents of Gujarat had to bear it when the police announced the turning off mobile internet access after the Patel community agitation over OBC quota turned violent across the state. There was a ban on many social networking services such as Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter from the night of 25 August to 28 August (26 August 2015, Times of India). Taking into account the incident, this study examines the role of Social Networking Applications (SNA) as a tool to spread and control this movement. This research paper collected data from multiple sources such as National daily newspaper i.e. The Hindu, The Times of India, DNA (Ahmedabad), Websites i.e. Facebook, Twitter and In-depth interview of the five participants of the Patidar Movement to verify the incident. This research paper used grounded theory for the identification of themes from the interview of five participants of the movement who expressed their views and experience during this movement (June - Sept. 2015). The themes of interview outcomes are connected to the idea that social media applications have the profound strength to influence individuals for a cause. At last, the findings from multiple sources are used to explore the strength of Social Networking Applications (SNA) in Patidar Anamat Andolan (PAA).*

**Key words:** Image Registration, Image Blending, Super Resolution, Interpolation

### INTRODUCTION:

India has witnessed some of social movements such as Anti Corruption, Nirbhaya and Patidar movements in which Social Networking Applications (SNA) were used to a large extent for its success. These social movements have shown 'how do people living in a democratic country become radicalized to the point, being willing to support directly to a person who is unknown so far to them'. Indeed, SNA such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp have grown in relevance and become a new catalyst tool in the formation of social movements in the past few years. These applications have gained world-wide popularity and helped people without a voice to get one voice. The most fascinating ability of this new tool is to connect and enable ordinary citizens to organize a civil movement with little to no costs, and the world has to bear the witness.

This research paper focusing on the case of Patidar Anamat Andolan (PAA) held in Gujarat, which became famous and successful to unite people in a very short period of time. National daily newspapers revealed that this movement used unorganized efforts instead of an organized effort to spread the message and gather maximum crowds. In a span of 45-days, this agitation spread like wildfire. When this movement turned hostile, police had to announce the turn off internet service for more than seventy two hours. Therefore, this research study trying to answer the research questions a) Are Social Media Application a long term tool to strengthen civil society? b) Should Government look into social media strategies to cope up with such incidences in the future?

This research paper is an attempt to understand the nature of the phenomenon, focusing on the use of social networking application for the success of the movement. The following sections discuss literature review, case of PAA and multiple data sources for analyzing the incident. Later, research methodology, findings are discussed which is followed by discussion, implication and conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been considerable researches regarding the role social media in the social movements. According to Shirky (2011), the political use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and cell phones have changed the traditional way of organizing social movements by providing more sources of knowledge, reducing costs of coordination and increasing the speed of information exchange. Moreover, it gives opportunity to most of the people even to uncommitted individuals to join the cause (Shirky, 2011). Social media give people the ability to easily publicize opinions at a low cost, to the speed and scale of group coordination (Lim 2012). The research study by Tilly (2004) revealed that the term 'social movement' was first introduced by the German Sociologist, Lorenz von Stein, during the 1950's, who defined social movements as a series of contentious performances, displays and campaigns by which ordinary people make collective claims of others. Therefore, it is a continuous, unitary process by which the whole working class gained self-consciousness and power (Tilly, 2004). The study by Tarrow (1994) defined it as collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities. The information is portable due to cell phones, personalized due to customized profiles and participatory as users have contributed to the creations of news, comments, or its dissemination via Facebook and Twitter (Serafeim, 2012). Once people know that others share their beliefs or feelings about a movement, it becomes easy to take collective action termed as information cascade (Tufekci, 2011). Hence, the movements resulted from social networking can be an important vehicle for social and political change, and have the potential to transform the systems of institutionalized politics in which they occur (McAdam 2001).

### Case of Patidar Anamat Andolan (PAA)

This case is framed on the basis of information in National Daily newspapers such as The Times of India, The Hindu, The DNA (Ahmedabad) and The Indian Express. The Patidar youth (Patels) formed a Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS), an apolitical organization, in order to seek Other Backward Class status for the community to get a reservation in government jobs and education in Gujarat. This agitation started from Mehsana and spread in other parts of Gujarat and nearby states from July 2015 onwards. As per the sources, social media helped in spreading this protest quickly across the state. PAAS had organized 37 rallies by 25 August 2015 within 55 days and another 149 rallies were organized by various organizations across the state. The major demonstration was organized in Ahmedabad on 25 August at GMDC ground in the form of 'Krantirally'. More than half million people were present to participate which was even more than the expectation of the organizers. Incidents of violence and clashes were also reported in Ahmedabad and other parts of the state in late evening of on 25 August. All of sudden all the internet services were blocked considering the sensitivity of the issue. The internet service on mobile phones and certain websites like WhatsApp and Facebook on broadband were blocked for six days from 26 August to 31 August across the state. The internet block was continued in some of the cities in Gujarat such as Ahmedabad and Surat even after returning to normalcy by 28 August, the state continued with blocking of internet services for three more days. The blockage of the internet was lifted in Ahmedabad and Surat on 1 September".

### Research Methodology

The present study is guided by social constructivism paradigm (Creswell, 2003). Author is focused on two core ontological aspects within this paradigm a) Number of realities, b) People giving meaning to context differently. Evidences from various sources are collected for the better understanding of the phenomenon, this research paper used qualitative methods in which in-depth interview of participants, published interview of PAAS in-charge, and some of tweets available on twitter, are used as data for the analysis purpose. Multiple sources of data are considered to check and establish the validity through data triangulation (Guio, 2002). Validity of content analysis is also achieved through the a preliminary reading of a relevant content, and careful selection of the sample of media content, downloading items from online media sites and reading relevant items from newspapers. The time frame is selected from June 2015 to September 2015. It is also mentioned by Charmaz (2006) that constructivist researchers design their own environment by analyzing data. Therefore, this study takes the help of grounded theory to explain the experience of participating in the movement, but its interpretation is through the researcher's mind. The description of data and its sources is given below.

#### a) In-depth Interview

An open ended interview was conducted with five participants, both males and females having age between 18-40 years. A few questions focusing on 'reason to join', 'their experience with the movement' and 'turn off internet access' were asked in Gujarati language. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed for analysis and interpretation purpose. At first, intra-text strategy is used for coding the data, then inter text strategy used for checking similarities and differences. At the end previously interpreted text and newly developed understanding were evaluated.

## **b) Published Interview**

A careful selection of the content from the published interview by in-charge of PAAS in DNA (Ahmedabad) on 25 August 2015, is done for analysis purpose.

*"We have not even set-up a control room or a committee that looks after propaganda. All efforts are self-motivated in Ahmedabad. There are about 56 WhatsApp groups and some 15 Facebook pages. None of these platforms are created by PAAS or Sardar Patel Group or any other local committees (there are 42 such groups) of the community. It is all self-motivated. An individual who supports the movement or our cause starts working for us on his own. Depending on his skill some create groups or pages; others contact people door-to-door at village level or ward level. Two applications for Android have been created for support, event participation and regular updates of the movement – Patidar and Patidar Anamat. They were created on August 18 and 19 respectively, and at least two thousand people are reported to have downloaded them by Friday evening. These are interactive apps which allow users to upload pictures and share thoughts "*

## **c) The responses on twitter by the public during the digital block:**

1. They used WhatsApp over Twitter for this protest- Justin@wyne
2. It looks like WhatsApp is now taking its place in the social media activity tool kits –Beyond Utility@Utility
3. WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook blocked here #Ahmedabad. I mean what would a person do then in Gujarat band - Paresh Godhwani@Paranormal

## **Findings**

The findings from multiple data analysis reveal that people participated in the movement in order to give strength to their community members and fight for the cause. The Participant's reasons to take part in the movement came out with theme 'cohesion' which is further divided into sub-themes a) unity b) group formation c) giving one voice d) self motivation. The theme 'source of information' is divided into sub-themes a) social network b) reference of community member c) reference of family and friends. The in depth interviews reveal that participants participated in the movement because their relatives and friend were also participating in it. Majority of interview participants came across information about this movement through WhatsApp. The findings on turning off internet service come out with the theme 'avoid negative consequences' reveals that internet service was called off due to fear of acquiring, publishing, and circulating video evidence of a violent situation. The second data source, i.e. published interview of PAAS in-charge confirmed the role of social media to spread awareness and growth of movement to this large extent in a very short period of time. Furthermore, the third data source, i.e. Twitter responses also confirmed that people were aware of turning off internet services, use of WhatsApp over Facebook for this movement, hence supports the role of SNA in PAA. People also faced the interruption and boredom when all of sudden internet was turned off.

Multiple data sources confirmed the blockage of internet service for more than seventy two hours. These findings clearly show that this movement the immense role of social media in the success of a movement.

## **CONCLUSION**

The social media prove to be a prominent communication source of information during the social movement. This research study confirms the intercommunication between people through SNA as a reason for success of PAA. SNA provides a platform to conduct social movement activities in which like-minded individuals organize a movement to grow more rapidly and effectively. But sometimes movement may turn hostile and affect society adversely. Therefore, the Government should also use the power of social media and control the situation to avoid any untoward to society.

## Discussion and Implications

The present study reveals a strong role of SNA in PAA. SNA played a vital role in planning, organizing and communicating this movement in time. The decision of blocking internet services caused an intrusion in freedom of speech and expression of the people. Taking a lesson from this incidence government should frame a surveillance system which can control the online activities under such circumstances. They should consider to block critical applications which are a threat to them. SNA are not just nerds rather they have become mainstream hence can be used as a two-edge sword by society and the Government.

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