

## ROLE OF NEW MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY

**Dr. Sreenivas Hodeyala**  
H.O.D.,  
Dept. of Journalism,  
Govinda Dasa College,  
Surathkal, Mangaluru,  
Karnataka- 575014

“Of the people, by the people, for the people”, these fruitful words by great Ebraham Lincoln is considered as the widely conveying an idea that peoples are the supreme authority in a democratic nation. It is sure that the opinion and the decision of the public will greatly influence the socio-political changes in a country. Without a free flow of information among the people, it is impossible to have a serious democratic functioning.

Since we are living in the age of propaganda, every communicative medium has its own importance in determining the path of democracy. New media, which is considered as the latest emerged communicative medium is also plying a great role in the democratic process of a nation. Internet, blogs, social networking cites, websites and other user generated media which comes under the category of new media has opened on endless opportunity to communicate with one another and to retrieve information as well. Obviously New Media has increased communication between the people all over the world without the barriers of regional boundaries. It is a fact that we can't imagine a democratic country without New Media as a medium for communication in the present scenario.

Surly it is the right time to assess the various aspects of New Media and also its influence in a deep manner. Not only in the sense of communicative medium but also as a game planner in democracy

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF NEW MEDIA:**

#### **1. SCOPE FOR SPEECH AND EXPRESSION:**

Freedom of speech is one of the main characteristics of democracy. Each and every person of a democratic nation have the right to express their views and ideas without any fear. The right to retrieve information should also be provided for them.

The major peculiarity of New Media is, it provides opportunity to communicate without any barriers. Person to person, person to many and many to many communication may possible through New Media. So New Media have a unique character than that of Mass Media. By providing endless possibility for speech and expression and also exchange of knowledge and information New Media can enrich democratic values and perspectives much better.

#### **2. DEMOCRATIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE:**

Democratization of knowledge and possibility to deliver the truthful information can be considered as great advantage of New Media. The term democracy is not only refers to the political atmosphere of a country, but it also should be considered in the aspect of knowledge,

education and social wellbeing of a nation. New Media ensuring a democratic flow of information and through this democratization of knowledge also.

Today there is a trend that, most of the Mass Media are owned by the corporate giants or political parties or sometimes religious organizations. Without considering the journalistic ethics it has become quite natural that owners ideological bids also creeping in to the news and programmes of the channel / print. So a value based opinion making is very difficult on the basis of information given by the mass media. A discussion through New Media, especially through social networking sites may help to overcome this crisis.

## **NEW MEDIA INFLUENCING SOCIETY:**

### **CASE STUDIES:**

The wide access and acceptance of New Media rises some relevant questions such as, how the New Media influencing democracy and to what extent New Media effecting day today democratic functioning of a nation?

With the experience of series of happenings, obviously we can illustrate the role of New Media in determining the public opinion, and also in the serious democratic process such as elections and public protest. Here are some important happenings which were highly motivated by New Media.

### **1. OCCUPY WALL STREET PROTEST:**

Occupy Wall Street protest was a great public movement which has got serious public interest and support. 2010 onwards America has been experiencing a dangerous economic meltdown and related crisis. The financial discrimination among the people was very high and to some extent it was incredible. People, especially the younger generation was unrest in this social discrimination. Many of them believed that the actual cause behind this economic crisis was the government policies which greatly supported the corporate sector.

At the time of increasing unrest among the people, two journalist of a Canadian anti consumerist journal *Abdusters* (named KelleLasn and Michael White) made a blog post on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2011. That post simply proposed the people to conduct a peaceful occupation of Wall Street to protest corporate influence on democracy. The later incidents and consequences followed that simple post was quite unbelievable. Thousands of people came and converged there in Succotti Park with a same slogan which converged the message, we are the 99% and you are only one percent, refers to the income inequality and wealth discrimination in us.

How these people came to know about this protest? Who were the organizers of that movement? Neal Caren a Professor and Sociologist from University of North Carolina has given the answer to these questions with authentic documents. He said, Social Media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have been the central organizing location for spreading information about occupy Wall Street. Facebook has become a recruiting tool for bringing in new supporters and getting people to events. The record says that Facebook pages related to occupy Wall Street protest have accumulated 390,000 likes and 770,000 comments.

It is very clear that for the entire occupy Wall Street protest, New Media was the catalyst which fueled people's emotions and outrages.

### **ANNA HAZARE MOVEMENT:**

Anna Hazare Movement in India against corruption was an unexpected public movement. Anna Hazare and his followers did not have any political party or political party's support. There

didn't have any coordinating committee to organize that protest and also there didn't have any particular leader. But thousands of people joined their hands to support Anna Hazare's protest against increasing corruption in India and for a Lokpal Bill. They converged at 'RamleelaMaidhan' where Anna Hazare lead a fasting and sathyagraha. Most of the protesters were students and intellectuals mainly representing the younger generation of India. Here also major tool for organizing that protest was New Media. Through the social networking sites they sought support for their struggle. They created new Facebook pages and blogs to intensify their propaganda for a New Lokpal Bill. That was a new experience for India that New Media has become a central tool to fuel a public protest.

#### **DELHI GANG RAPE ISSUE:**

2013 December 16<sup>th</sup> was a shameful day for Indian democracy. A 23 year old Paramedical student gang raped in the Metro City of Delhi. That incident triggered a nationwide outrage in the next day itself. Peoples without any religious and political barriers got together and they marched to 'JandharMandhar'. They demanded necessary and serious action against the rapist. Here also a collective leadership was absent. Everybody who joined in this protest was himself / herself a leader. The basic organizer of the protest was social networks. An unbelievable spontaneous public movement opened the eyes of administrators and resulted in the implementation of a new law which ensures top most punishment for the culprits in rape case.

#### **AZAM RIOT – A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE:**

Occupy Wall Street, Anna Hazare Movement and protest for women safety in India can be shown as the positive movement which enriches democracy. As far as these movements are conserved the role of New Media will be there in the golden letters.

Will the New Media be a positive motivator in democracy forever? Absolutely no, is the answer. Because, already we have the bitter experiences from our own land itself. Assam riot of 2012 was the worst experience with the destructive possibility of New Media. On July 25<sup>th</sup> 2012, an ethnic clash has broken out between indigenous Bodo tribes and Bengali Muslim settlers in Kokrajabar district of Assam only because of some religious comments in Facebook. Clashes get fueled with many people worst contribution with their own Facebook posts. Telephone messages also carried out dangerous communal disputing ideas. Assam riot can be considered as the destructive face of New Media.

#### **UNSEEN FACTORS OF NEW MEDIA MOTIVATED MOVEMENTS:**

We have already discussed about the movements across the world which were highly motivated by New Media. Here in all these movements we can analyse a common characteristic, that is the major contribution to these movements were younger generation especially who were staying and practicing in the urban area. They were educated, socially awarded people representing the middle class economic category of the world. All of them are provided with an average life standard which lies over poverty line and below the upper class.

The very special approach of middle class people are, they want to reach a better social standard than that of what they are. Simply it means they are not satisfied with what they have. So to some extent they have an explosive nature which can be resulted in a public movement. But, whatever it may be, they will not be ready to suffer or sacrifice already what they dealt with. This was the factor played behind the movement which we have discussed. That is why all these movements turned out to be a flash mob protest. We can observe that middle class led

movements across the world didn't possess a continuation. We can see it in the case of Wall Street protest, Jasmine revolution and also in Anna Hazare movement.

**NEW MEDIA IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY:**

India is the largest democracy in the world with more than 21 crore population and a large territory. Even though the Indian democracy is just 66 year old young democracy, we have a much better position among the world nations and we had possess a well-known reputation by keeping non alliance character. But the present situation of Indian democracy is not in a good rhythm.

A parliamentary commission led by ArjunSen Gupta, which was appointed by Indian government in the year 2004, submitted a report to the upper house of Indian parliament. The findings of that report was incredible with a figure that 77.76% (over 80 crore) of Indian population is struggling with a daily income of 20 rupees. Now we have crossed nine more years. But still the conditions of Indian people are same. The latest report of planning commission say that poverty incident had declined from 37.2% to 21.9%. But a very interesting fact is, the line that decided by planning commission is 33 rupees / day (urban area) and 28 rupees / day in rural area to determine poverty. How the people can lead a satisfied life with 28 or 33 rupees? Even though the people struggling with poverty, the number of corporate giants in India is still increasing. Corruption in the administrative level is also unbelievable.

In this pathetic condition of our country, will the new media can be a game planner in the coming 2014 parliament election? This is a debatable question.

Leading national parties of our country, Congress and BJP is giving much more importance for the campaign through New Media. Both Rahul Gandhi and NarendraModi, who was considered to be the Prime Ministerial candidature of these parties has been very actively participating in the discussion through social networks for last five years. They are making their comments and opinions through Twitter more than public speeches. Will it be a crucial advantage and major criteria for electing a particular party in the election?

The past records and present situation clearly says that New Media cannot be a game planner in whole in the coming election. Considered to the other world nations, the penetration of internet in India remains quite low. It is believed that by the end of 2013 the total number of internet users in India will reach 13.7 crore people. It is just 11.4% of our population.

The past, present and nearest future of internet users in India is given below:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Expected no. of people with internet</b>	<b>In percentage of population</b>
2011	83.2 million	7%
2012	107.3 million	8.9%
2013	133.1 million	10.9%
2014	155.8 million	12.6%
2015	175.2 million	13.5%
2016	193.8 million	15.3%

According to a survey conducted by internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), majority of the internet users belongs to middle class, who are staying in the urban area. The report says that in June 2012, 71% of active internet users (80 million people) were from the cities and only 31 million from rural area. At the same time Indian census figures says that the

Indian population can be divided as 339 million people from urban area and 833 million from rural section.

Still in India, there is a sharp divide remains between haves and have nots. So the possibility of reaching internet to the entire population in a near future is absolutely difficult. The records those we have says that, in the year 2014 (in which election is going to be held) the expected internet users in India will be 155.8 million people. How a very simple percent of people can determine democracy? No chance at all. But we can't neglect the possibility of New Media as a tool for propaganda especially in cities. They can be a game planner at least in several constituencies of metro cities.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Every medium has its own advantage and disadvantages. Since the New Media is addressing the whole world within seconds, it can play a great role in each and every happening. As far as democratic nations are concerned the administrators can't avoid New Media. In the countries which are still under dictatorship, New Media can be the provider of democracy by spreading the democratic movements from one to another. Jasmine revolution is one of the typical examples for this type of movement. Meanwhile, New Media comprises the destructive elements also. So more over the administrators, people should be aware of how the new media to be handled.

### **REFERENCES**

- Roy Barun, 'Beginners'Guide to Journalism'(2004), Pustak Mahal, Delhi-110006
- Hasan Seema, 'Mass Communication principles and Concepts'(2010),CBS Publishers and Distributers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi-110002
- Outlook weekly, March 15, 2014
- Front Line Monthly, April, 2014
- The Hindu News Paper
- Wikipedia.org