Rice Bucket Challenge: Purpose, Politics and Effects

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Abstract

Today, the difference between the virtual and the real is diminishing. The virtual is becoming real. The best example is Cyber activism, which is identified as a newer kind of activism which conventional protests gets replaced with posting status and sharing one’s political thoughts among the cyber users. Before the popularization of new media, agitation takes place by getting down into the streets and protesting using posturing posters on walls, conducting strikes and meetings where a leader speaks to the audience and make them understand the necessity of their protest. But now such a system is completely taken over by a new kind of activism named as cyber activism. Here hour long speeches by the leader is replaced by capsule or character limited tweets or status updates from leaders who until then, were not in mainstream. These leaders even though less known and identified, take the command of power through the weapons of social media. Cyber activism is any strategy that seeks to change the public agenda and include a new topic for social debate by spreading a certain message. This message is spread through a word of mouth process which is multiplied by electronic communication and personal publishing media.

Keywords: Politics; Social media; Cyber media

Introduction

Today, the difference between the virtual and the real is diminishing. The virtual is becoming real. The best example is cyber activism, which is identified as a newer kind of activism which conventional protests gets replaced with posting status and sharing one’s political thoughts among the cyber users. Before the popularization of new media, agitation takes place by getting down into the streets and protesting using posturing posters on walls, conducting strikes and meetings where a leader speaks to the audience and make them understand the necessity of their protest. But now such a system is completely taken over by a new kind of activism named as cyber activism. Here hour long speeches by the leader is replaced by capsule or character limited tweets or status updates from leaders who until then, were not in mainstream. These leaders even though less known and identified, take the command of power through the weapons of social media. Cyber activism is any strategy that seeks to change the public agenda and include a new topic for social debate by spreading a certain message. This message is spread through a word of mouth process which is multiplied by electronic communication and personal publishing media [1].

Study shows that there is a steady hike in the number of internet users all over the world and in India; this is very well reflected in Kerala too. Even though entertainment takes away a major portion in social media networks, Political discussions get an ample space among the other forms of chit-chats on the net. This may be due to the high level of political literacy of Malayalees.

Recent strikes like Nilppu Samaram of Adivasis got a very strong support from social media; this was not well treated by traditional media. Cyber media assured immense support for them with regular follow ups. In cyber media there is a kind of anonymous leadership that makes people unite for a common reason and getting them into the field of action. The most important thing is that this group includes both people from politically active and inactive people (Figure 1).

Recently many state, national and international level issues got a huge support from Facebook. People were successful in taking the right stand in majority of the issues. ‘Save Mullaperiyar’ campaign got an encouraging space in social media. ‘Save western Ghats’ was another campaign which was well discussed by social media users in Kerala. Aaam Aadmi Party (AAP) similar to national level got into the Malayalees mind through social media. Many joined the party because of this campaign and later they became active workers of the party. Regional wise meeting was held based on this group and thus it supported in the growth of AAP in Kerala. ‘Clean India campaign’ which now is running got established through social media [2]. During the time of Delhi rape issue a very bold and strong protest were visible in social media among Kerala youth. The most common demonstration were making the profile picture as ‘Dark Bindi’ implying ‘Nirbhaya’ the girl who lost her life after the brutal rape. Recently, when the Israel-Palestine issue...
got into its full pace social media initiative was really appreciating. Remembering that Central government was a failure in taking the right stand, social media spoke for Gaza. This ‘save Gaza’ campaign was not limited with anti-Israel posts or comments but energetic groups in Facebook came out with the slogan as ‘Boycotting Israeli products’. In this campaign the Israel products were pointed out and asked the people to stop using it. This campaign got an encouraging response from the youth in Kerala. Facebook gatherings were also conducted in solidarity with all these issues across Kerala. Facebook groups took initiatives in many social service activities like building houses for the poor, blood donation campaign, organ donation campaigns etc. Also posts asking for similar blood group and financial help for the poor are common in social media especially in Facebook [3].

So these kinds of gatherings will result in a different activism which is not visible in earlier times. A civic engagement is active in all these incidents. As a result conventional media are compelled to follow and take up the issue. So in all the cases a civic engagement is happened and its nature is not predictable always [4].

Civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future. It is the way in which civil society is invited to participate in on-going political, economic and social efforts that are meant to bring about social change. So it is important to know whether a civic engagement is happening through cyber activism and its consistency and resistance. It is a wide range of activities, including developing civic sensitivity, participation in buildings a civic society, and bringing a common good. Among the various cyber activations, one is cyber challenges [5].

Cyber Challenges

We are taught from childhood that life is a challenge, meet it. Our world is now going behind challenges. A challenge is a call to someone to participate in a competitive situation or fight to decide who is superior in terms of ability or strength. It is observed that the most productive outcomes are obtained under challenging circumstances. Here, the word challenge is used in order to take part as well as continue an activity by involving other people.

The cyber challenging trend became so viral with the Ice bucket challenge, which was to promote the awareness of the disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a neurodegenerative disorder spread mainly across US and encourage donations to its research. The challenge involved the participant dumping a bucket of ice water on his/her head and later challenging a minimum of three persons to do so. This process continues.

The challenge followed a lot of criticisms like losing the importance of cause, focussing on publicity and stunt rather than donations, misuse of funds, misuse of water, health reasons and sexuality exposure. A number of other challenges like my tree challenge, love bucket challenge etc. followed the ice bucket challenge. One among them was the rice bucket challenge [6].

Rice Bucket Challenge

The rice bucket challenge is an alternative of ice bucket challenge. It started in India and spread to other South Asian nations. It was a response to the ice bucket challenge. Rice bucket challenge involves donating a bucket of rice to a poor person or family. It served the dual purpose of highlighting water scarcity and poverty [7].

The idea is by Manju Latha Kalanidhi, a 38-year-old journalist from Hyderabad. She considered the ice bucket challenge artificial and a waste of water and so came up with the rice bucket challenge as a less wasteful alternative that would help local communities. It is described by her as an “Indian version for Indian needs”.

It started as a Facebook page on August 23, 2014, and within a day, the page had 7000 likes. On August 24, 2014, the Twitter hashtag #rice bucket challenge was first used, and within a month, the hashtag had been tweeted 11,000 times. Rice bucket challenge had received coverage in CNN, NDTV, Time, The Hindu and many other media. In the first week itself, the idea went viral with thousands taking up the challenge. All that one has to do is pick up a bowl of rice and hand it over to a needy person. Pictures of the act can be posted to Facebook with the #rice bucket challenge. On completion of the challenge, one can challenge others to do it by tagging them. Pictures have flooded the Facebook page of the challenge [8].

The donors, who have proudly posted photos of their charitable act, hail from all parts of the country and abroad. They comprise students and teachers, young and old, rich and poor, celebrities and ordinary people. It also spread to other South Asian nations, including Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Rice bucket challenge in Kerala

Inspired by Manju Latha Kalanidhi’s idea, many individuals and organizations like College of Engineering, Adoor and Technopark conducted the rice bucket challenge. Apart from such independent programmes, rice bucket challenge in Kerala is promoted as well as propagated by an independent private organization called the Kerala Fashion League. Rice bucket challenge was the first activity initiated by the organization [9].

The first rice bucket challenge was conducted by Abhil Dev, the founder of the Kerala Fashion League on the very next day of its beginning by donating 500 kg rice to Daya Charitable Trust, Kozhikode. Kerala Fashion league conducted the challenge in more than 50 organizations out of which 33 were educational institutions. Today Kerala is leading in terms of the number of programmes and quantity of rice. Out of the 16000 kg rice, 11000 kg is contributed by the programmes of Kerala Fashion League. Presentation higher secondary school of Calicut leads with 20000 kg rice [10].

The team includes members from fashion and film industries. Eminent personalities like Rahul Eswar (author and activist), Maqbool Salman (Actor), Sidharth Menon (Singer) Anjana Menon (South Indian Actress), Lalu Krishnadas (International fashion choreographer) Anjana John (International fashion designer) are a part of the league.

The programme is presented as an extravagance show. It is usually held as a two hour programme completely handled by the Kerala Fashion League team. Every member speaks about the challenge and announces their contribution. It is after that, the institution is challenged. It is started with a person or a department. The competition becomes tight and each department have a tendency to donate more amount of rice than the department who challenged [11].

Sometimes poor or needy persons from nearby localities or even in the same institution are called upon stage to receive the rice. At the same time, the news about the establishment of the Kerala Fashion League and its major activities are also emphasised. The team has already visited famous schools and colleges all over Kerala. They are still continuing the programmes. The first edition of the programme will be stopped on January 24 after great grand charity of one lakh kg
rice by the Mannarkad Charity Trust which is supposed to enter the Guinness book of world records [12].

Statement of the Problem

Professionalized and commercialized profit oriented media industry is no longer meant for a service oriented patriotic journalist. It is now a group of professionals who work for a salary along with the interests of their respective owners, who serves the interests of MNCs and other monopolies.

On the other side, the process of professionalization and commercialization left a pale-face of the workers or journalists. So at certain cases they fail to take the right stand and talks for the common man. So people are trying for newer alternatives where they can express their thoughts and share their views without any constraints. Social Networking sites with its huge strength to hold a mass at a time creates an opportunity to perform certain activism [13].

At the same time, it has to be examined whether such activisms are creating any impact on the society. It is seen that such activisms come and go without creating an impression. Rice bucket challenge is one such social activism which is continuing in our society. Even if it originated as a purely social form, it is being utilised as a publicity tool at least in some cases.

So it is important to study whether such a cyber-activism which later caste itself as a social activism conducted by a private organisation as a part of their publicity works creates any impact on the society.

Scope and relevance of the study

Does such a kind of activism named rice bucket challenge actually create an impact on youth? If it created, is it a long term or a short term effect? Are youth aware of the politics of the challenge? There are many questions to be answered. Many online protests are getting into its cause with huge number of participation to it. So it is relevant to check its consistency and resistance. And as present day politics is getting new faces day by day, the study seems to be more interesting. So it is in this realm the topic Rice Bucket Challenge, as a product of cyber activism is to be studied. The following chapter will discuss related studies as well as examine external data sources.

Review of Literature

Introduction

A logical and systematic review of the literature often sets the stage for the completion of a successful research proposal and successful study. A complete review provides a framework with which the researcher can answer the important questions and chronologically order the ideas and concepts developed over years. It also shows how some ideas were rejected/accepted. The chapter reviews related studies in the area which may suggest a clear theoretical background of the problem and outline the research trends in the field. Given the space constraints, only recent are listed.

Reviewing the literature

Richard Kahn and Douglas Bellner in their research paper, New media and internet activism: from the 'Battle of Seattle' to blogging is an important study in this topic. The paper studies how new media developments in techno culture make possible a reconfiguring of politics and culture and are pushing politics on everyday life. The paper arrives at a conclusion that political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments, and other sites of past struggle; but politics is already mediated by broadcast, computer, and information technologies and will be so increasingly in the future [14].

Lance Bennett in his paper New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism with the advent of interactive communication and information systems, from IndyMedi to the future BBC attempts to study the changing media behaviour from television to online and the competition created by the same. He notices that as experiments with global citizenship go forward, the empowerment offered by distributed, networked digital communication may become shared more widely. This warrants an important adjustment to media hegemony theories. Mass media news outlets are struggling mightily with changing gatekeeping standards due to demands for interactive content produced by audiences themselves. As consumer-driven content progresses beyond chats and click polls, new possibilities arise for high quality political information governed by more democratic and less elite editorial standards. Technologically savvy activists are writing software that enables automated and democratic publishing and editing. Ordinary people are empowered to report on their political experiences while being held to high standards of information quality and community values. He concludes that the distinction between information producers and consumers will become increasingly difficult to draw. He also predicts the competition conventional media will face in the near future [15].

Famed activist Ralph Nader has stated that “the internet doesn’t do a very good job of motivating action,” citing that the United States Congress, corporations and the pentagon do not necessarily “fear the civil use of internet”. Ethan Zuckerman talks about “slacktivism”, claiming that the internet has devalued certain currencies of activism. Citizen may “like” an activist group on Facebook, visit a website or comment on a blog, but fails to engage in political activism beyond the internet, such as volunteering and canvassing [16].

Jeffrey Ghannam states in a report to the Centre for International Media Assistance, “social networking has changed expectations of freedom of expression and association to the degree that individual and collective capacities to communicate, mobilize, and gain technical knowledge are expected to lead to even greater voice, political influence, and participation over the next 10 to 20 years.”

Protesting in the age of social media: Information, opinion expression and activism in online networks by Sebastian Valenzuela in 2012 studies on the political impact of individuals using digital media like social media including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. He argues that adults who use social media participate in protests because interactive media are channels for learning political information, expressing political opinions and joining causes promoted by social movements. He concludes that the information provided by social media can mobilize people and allows users to join political causes by creating opportunities to exchange opinions with other people [17].

Throughout the past decade, social media have come on the scene of various popular revolts. In this plot, Regina Salanova of Barcelona institute of journalism in her paper social media and political change: The case of the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt [18]. Their role as tools of information and coordination of social movements, from the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 to the Arab uprisings in 2011, has been widely debated. In most cases, she observes that online activism through blogs, Facebook, Twitter or other forms of social media has allowed citizens to be part of a social networking exercise and to engage in a public sphere that would have otherwise been unreachable to them due to severe repression. In Tunisia and Egypt,
social media helped protests start and expand thanks to their ability to coordinate and disseminate information quickly. The new information and communication tools were an influential factor in accelerating the revolutionary processes across the Arab world, albeit they cannot be seen as neither the spur nor the drivers of any revolution.

**Cyber Activism and social network media**

Appropriating the emerging platform to promote national-building and peace is an important paper written by Adefolarin A Olamilekan. The article sets out to demonstrate the value and role cyber activism and social network media can play in the promoting of nation building and peace. It looks at the conceptual definition of cyber-activism, social networking media, nation building, peace and there manifold meaning. This leads to a discussion of the relevance of discourse theory to a study of nation building of the relevance of discourse theory to a study of nation building and peace, especially to the understanding of nationalist ideology. The paper concludes that cyber activism and social networking media platform is a viable tool, hence can enhance the promotion of nation building and peace, although the study identify some criticism against the uses of internet being the platform cyber activism and social networking media are both create and user generated content.

Journals are by far the important and valuable primary sources of information about a topic since they represent the most direct link between the researchers, the work of other researchers and our own interest. A journal is a collection of research articles published in a particular area by some professional group. The researcher depended on various articles and thesis work by experts in the field for review of literature for the topic. The following chapter will explicate the objectives and methodology of the survey [19].

**Objectives and Methodology**

**Research methodology**

Methodology in general is defined as the analysis of the principles of methods, rules, and postulates employed by a discipline and the systematic study of methods that are, can be, or have been applied within a discipline. And objectives simply refer to the goals that are supposed to be achieved through the particular study.

This chapter describes the objectives and methodology of the study as a whole. It dissects the title of the subject, states the objectives and put forward the hypotheses of the study, explain the methodology used to collect the required data, clarifies data collection a and analysis and details the test and equation applied in [20,21].

**Operational definitions**

The critical terms that repeatedly occur and define the course of this work are defined as follows:

- **Social networking sites**: Social Networking Sites may be defined as sites that allow users to build a profile that will be made public within an enclosed system. It can be used to describe community based websites, online discussion forums, chat room and other social spaces online.

- **Students**: In this study, students is defined as individuals whose age group lies between 18-21 years, who witnessed an participated in the rice bucket challenge at Devagiri College, Calicut.

- **Cyber activism**: Cyber activism is defined as the process of using internet-based social networks and platforms to create, operate and manage activism of any type.

**Challenge**: A challenge is a call to someone to participate in a competitive situation or fight to decide who is superior in terms of ability or strength.

**Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the impact of the rice bucket challenge held at St. Joseph's college, Devagiri on students.

To materialize the general objective, the following specific objectives are set and they throw light on various dimensions of the trend.

1. To analyse the influence of rice bucket challenge on the view of students towards charity.
2. To assess the attitude of students towards rice bucket challenge.
3. To find out the approach of students towards the organizers of rice bucket challenge.
4. To check whether the goal of the organizers of rice bucket challenge is fulfilled.
5. To examine the opinion of students towards the changing trend in the language social activity.

**Methodology**

The present study used survey research method to collect required data from the field since the study investigates the impact of rice bucket challenge on the students of Devagiri College, Calicut. The survey was conducted by administering a structured questionnaire. Survey method is an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents and statistical techniques can be used to determine validity, reliability, and statistical significance. Methodology was designed according to the nature of the problem, area and type of research.

Given the field manageability, stratified random sampling was used to identify the respondents from six departments of the College: Department of Business Management, Department of Mass Communication, Department of English, Department of Chemistry, Department of Mathematics and Department of Economics.

The purpose of this division was to ensure maximum representation of the whole scenario of the college.

An interview was conducted with the chief organizer of the Kerala Fashion League rice bucket challenge in order to get their view about the purpose, politics and effect of the programme.

From the vast group of students at the College, the population, 120 students are taken as representatives of the whole. They are taken indifferently from different academic background. Total 138 individuals were randomly selected the questionnaire was administered to them. Finally, 120 questionnaires were successfully completed.

**Findings and Analysis**

**Interview**

Among the many questions asked in the interview conducted with the chief organizer of the Kerala fashion league Rice Bucket Challenge, the important aspects which are taken for the study are explained.

- The aim of the rice bucket challenge is to develop a helping mentality and an attitude for sharing and charity among youth.
The organizers chose the mode of presentation of the programme is clearly chosen as per the tastes of the young minds, in order to make youth interested in the challenge.

Since it is an initial activity of the Kerala Fashion League, they are expecting themselves to get established and to increase their fame.

Survey

A survey on the impact of rice bucket challenge conducted by Kerala Fashion League at St. Joseph’s College, Devagiri, Calicut yielded some meaningful results that helped to give valuable suggestions to the organizers of this great concept.

Sample selection: The study focused on students from six different departments in the age group between 17 and 20. The findings are as follows. Out of the 120 samples, 68 were boys and 52 were girls. Since the study has no objective of analysing the response of male and female separately, this difference doesn’t matter much (Figure 2).

Whether rice bucket challenge influenced their attitude towards charity: Among the samples, 77 students said that their attitude towards charity changed after the rice bucket challenge whereas 43 students claim that the show didn’t influence their attitude towards charity (Figure 3).

Whether they continued with follow up charity activities: Among the samples, 33 students continued charity activities as follow up of the rice bucket challenge whereas 87 students didn’t go for any follow ups (Figure 4).

Exhibiting and presenting a charity programme as a fashion extravagance occasion: Among the samples, 92 students are against exhibiting and presenting a charity programme as a fashion extravagance and occasion and 23% students supported the idea.

Charity as challenge: Among the samples, 79% students are against staging charity programme as a competition and 21% students liked presenting charity as challenge.

Their attitude about staging the needy and showcasing charity: Among the samples, 86 students are against staging the needy and showcasing charity and 34 students said that there is no wrong in doing so (Figure 7).

Whether rice bucket challenge is having any benefit to organizers: Among the samples, 72 students said that the organizers of the rice bucket challenge are not having any personal benefit and 48 students claimed that the organizers have their own personal benefits (Figure 8).
Whether they could give the name of the company who organized the rice bucket challenge: Among the samples, 87 students memorized and wrote the name of the organizers of the Rice Bucket challenge, 21 students partially remembered the name and 12 students failed to remember the name (Figure 9).

Whether they had heard about the company before: Among the samples, 102 students had never heard about the company before and 18 students claimed that they knew about the organizers before the show (Figure 10).

Whether they liked the trend of changing the language of social activity: Among the samples, 31 students liked the trend of change in the language of social activity and 89 students are against this trend (Figure 11).

Discussion and Conclusion

A study on the impact of rice bucket challenge conducted by Kerala Fashion League at St. Joseph’s College, Devagiri, Calicut yielded gave a clear picture about the impact of rice bucket challenge among students.

First and foremost finding is that most of the students answered that the challenge was very helpful for them to develop a favourable attitude towards charity. At the same time only few engaged themselves in activities as follow ups. This shows that even though the rice bucket challenge created an impact, it failed to create a long term impression on students and to promote the habit of sharing as well as helping among them. This is considered to as a failure of the motto of the Kerala Fashion League Rice Bucket Challenge.

Majority of the students have a favourable attitude towards the theme rice bucket challenge but are against the mode of presentation of the programme by the Kerala Fashion League. This includes mainly three aspects. First one is the luxurious mode of the show for which many specified their reasons for disliking as including a lot of celebrities and creating a fashionable ambience. Second is the concept of creating an atmosphere of competition and thereby increasing the amount of contribution of the rice. Most of the students said that it is because charity is noble and should be done with a whole heart and not with a competitive spirit that they are against this. The third one is inviting the needy on stage and creating an emotional scenario along with cinematic scenes. Students have a common opinion that this deeply affects the dignity of the person and can’t be supported. This contradicts with the opinion of the organizer who claimed to use such a mode to impress youth.

The study reached to a turning point where the majority of the students said that the organizer of the rice bucket challenge does not get any benefit from this. A big majority of students remember the name “Kerala Fashion League” and majority heard the name for the first time on the event. It is very clear that the publicity of the organizer is multiplying in magical rates and the students are unaware of the
major advantage “publicity” which the organizers and their league gained from the Rice Bucket Challenge. As quoted by the organizer, the name is established and even moving to a world level record.

Another interesting result of the study is that a majority of the students didn’t like the change in the language of social activity. This shows the conventional way in which thoughts are formed and the refusal for a paradigm shift in the mode of social activities.

Limitations

The study was conducted on the basis of 120 samples were only taken from a single college. Time constraints and feasibility were the main reasons for this. Had the sample size be more and had more institutions included in the study, the result would have been more accurate.

Recommendations

For organizer

The rice bucket challenge is a great concept and is widely accepted among the students. But the impact is not persisting. It would be great if continuous day’s cyber challenges like the 100 helping days are introduced as a part of Rice Bucket Challenge. Along with appreciating the idea, a suggestion is about the way of presentation. The mode of presentation of the challenge could be minimalized to a proper and coordinated way without including the needy on the stage and without making it a competitive event. Instead of getting a celebration or emotional ambience, a simple and formal way would be apt. Rice is not the only thing which the poor require. It would be great if follow up programmes focussing on other needs is established.

For students

In our present life style, charity is not given proper importance in majority houses. If a two hour rice bucket challenge could create an impact on you, what about doing such great and little things daily. Organize more programmes like rice bucket challenge and continue such activities. Instead of sticking on to the conventional ideas of social activity and charity, an open mind towards the new trends in the language of social activity developed yield better results. It is better to do something than nothing. And since that something is not harming anyone and is creating a small layer of virtue, encouraging it is necessary for the general progress.

For other organizations

Social activities for a good cause is always appreciated and supported among the students. Publicity is a necessary for any business firm to function. It would be great if you can incorporate such social activities which benefit both the society and the company.

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