

Changing paradigms of socio-political participation, impact of new media on the youth of South Kashmir

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Abstract

In the era of communication revolution where each and every life affair seems irrelevant without the media technology, communication plays a pivotal role. There is a paradigm shift in media consumption habits of people as they are becoming more and more active participants in the process of communication rather than being passive receivers of mass media messages.

The present paper includes the results of a research carried out to analyze the impact of new media on socio-political participation of youth in south Kashmir of J&K state. The paper illustrates the extent of media penetration in the lives of people more specifically among youth of Anantnag.

For the accomplishment of objectives of the study, Kashmiri youth (16-30 yrs. of age) within the boundaries of Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian, and Pulwama have been selected. Keeping in view the length and breadth of the research area, it was humanly impossible to reach each and every nook and corner of the districts. So for drawing a representative sample multi-stratified sampling was employed by the researcher. The total sample size was 600 youth selected from the four districts of south Kashmir.

The study has revealed that new media vis-à-vis social media has changed the culture of political engagement among the young generation and it is playing a major role in shaping the social and economic ideologies of youth of the area.

Keywords: survey, youth, paradigm shift, new media, social media, political expression

Introduction

Mass media has assumed a greater significance in Kashmir valley, like in any other part of the world. Apart from three conventional media forms- Radio, television, and newspapers- new media is effective in every sphere of life, be it social, political or economical.

Media plays an important role in creating political awareness among the people and ensures their participation in the democratic process. It also plays a significant role in bringing changes in the society (Melvin, 1996)

In older times the main medium of communication in Kashmir was the traditional folk media which performed the function of information, education and entertainment. Later, newspapers made their entry in to the valley. Today there are hundreds of newspaper offices besides the bureaus of dozens of national and international news organizations.

Almost after hundred years of the print medium, Radio made its entry in Kashmir. It was 1st of July 1948 when Radio Kashmir Srinagar was inaugurated. After about 25 years of radio, on 26th January 1973 came television in Kashmir. At that time the radio Kashmir celebrated its silver jubilee. The television in Kashmir was launched with the aim to counter propaganda of Pakistan television.

Almost after thirty years of TV mobile telephone services made their entry in the valley on 14th of August 2003. With its introduction in the valley it opened doors for social networking which changed the life style, political engagement and ways of social relations of people in general and youth of the valley in particular. Internet based social media sites have been increasingly used to organize political activism across the state. It is difficult to ignore the effect of social media on major political events in Kashmir.

New media allows greater participation of its users making them active distributors of information besides developing

creativity among youth. New media technologies are becoming part and parcel of the youth culture. They have so permeated young lives that it is hard to believe that less than a decade ago these technologies barely existed. Social networking sites such as Facebook, video streaming sites like twitter, messaging applications such as WhatsApp and blogs all fall into the horizon of New Media. It is the easiest, fastest, and most effective way to communicate with other people around the world.

From last six years people in Kashmir utilize New Media for reporting events on their own hence communicating their messages with the rest of the world. This has opened doors for citizen journalism in the valley.

Unlike their immediate predecessors Kashmiri youth are struggling for autonomy, self-expression and identity through the means of social networking. Social media has changed the ways and means of political participation among Kashmiri youth and it is proving to be the most effective tool for highlighting their cause.

Online spaces enable youth to connect with peers in new ways. Most youth use online networks to extend the friendships that they navigate in the familiar contexts of school, religious organizations, sports and other local activities. New media allows for a degree of freedom and autonomy for youth that is less apparent in a classroom setting.

Rationale of the Study

The study was aimed at finding out 'the impact of new media on socio-political participation of youth in south Kashmir of J&K state'. The study is important as it aimed at studying the impact of new media on the most vibrant and enthusiastic section of the society within the age group of 16-30 years. Moreover, no study of this kind has been conducted earlier so it was the dire need of the hour.

Statement of the Problem

Media have a vital place in the lives of people. There is a paradigm shift in media consumption habits of people as they are becoming more and more active participants in the process of communication rather than being passive receivers of mass media messages. However this shift is more likely to be seen in the youth than in any other category.

The problem is worded as, *“changing paradigms of socio-political participation, impact of new media on the youth of south Kashmir”*

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

- To study the accessibility and usage patterns of Kashmiri youth vis-à-vis new communication media.
- To find out impact of new media on political engagement of youth in Kashmir.
- To study the influence of new media on cultural aspects in Kashmir.
- To study the impact of new media on social behaviour of youth in the area.

Hypothesis

- New media had made a remarkable impact in the lives of people and is playing a major role in shaping the political, social and economic ideologies among the youth of Kashmir.
- New Media had changed the culture of political engagement among youth in Kashmir.

Methodology

The empirical evidence for the current paper is primarily gathered by employing triangulation method. Here both qualitative as well as quantitative methods have been employed for data collection keeping the diverse objectives of the study in consideration.

The basic methodology, which the researcher adopted, was the Survey method.

Though the survey demanded only a questionnaire or direct observation through interview schedules. Hence a structured questionnaire has been used for the purpose of the study. Where ever the situation demanded in case of illiterate or not so literate respondent, the questions were used as an interview schedule to elicit the responses of the respondents. The questionnaire contained both open ended as well as close ended questions to get a varied range of responses. The questionnaires were personally administered to the respondents by the researcher.

For the accomplishment of objectives of the study, Kashmiri youth (16-30 yrs of age) within the boundaries of south Kashmir have been selected. Keeping in view the length and breadth of the district, it was humanly impossible to reach each and every nook and corner of the district. So for drawing a representative sample multi-stratified sampling was employed by the researcher. The survey was conducted in four districts of South Kashmir.

A mixed questionnaire will be administered to 600 respondents (150 from each district) belonging to the age group of 16-30 years for eliciting varied range of responses. Proper rationalization will be followed by keeping the population density and rural urban divide of each district in consideration.

Moreover, the questionnaires will be distributed giving an equal weightage to both genders.

Interview and Group Discussion

To have an in-depth insight of the issue, interviews and group discussion among youth, social activists, academicians, journalists and scholars will be conducted. During these interviews different socio-political implications of New Media will be discussed and the understanding and opinions of all the groups will be accordingly collected. No structured format will be adopted for the interviews.

Findings

Media have a vital place in the lives of people in South Kashmir. Besides the gap in media exposure among Media Rich and Media Poor (urban and rural), Media has made its entry in every one’s life affair. The introduction of the mobile phone technology and mobile internet has changed the media preferences of the people in general and that of the young generation in particular.

Mobile phone possession

South Kashmir seems no exception to the modern communication technology and it has been found that 92% of the respondents possess their own mobile phones ranging from high definition android handsets to the mere caller sets. Only 8% of the respondents don’t possess a mobile. During the research it was found that least economic condition is a big hindrance in purchasing a mobile hand set. In addition to this conservative social structure keeps a good portion of the youth especially girls away from this technology.

Table 1: Table depicting the mobile phone possession by the respondents.

S No.	Response	Number	Frequency
1	Yes	553	92.16%
2	No	47	7.83%
	Total	600	100%

Net access via mobile phone

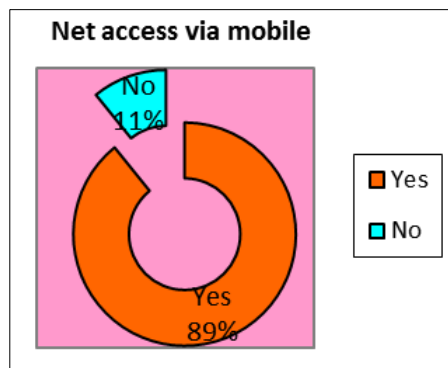


Fig 1: Chart showing the net access of respondents via mobiles

Since the developments in the overall media industry in the world, South Kashmir also experienced tremendous changes in this field which is evident from the current research. More than 89% of the youth are having internet access on their mobile phones which is largely due to the services of Reliance Jio network.

The people not possessing internet on their mobile phones either are very poor or are the victims of traditional conservatism.

Purpose of browsing internet

It is evident from the research that a good portion of youth of the study area use internet for social networking. This argument is supported by the tabulated data which reveals that nearly 52% of the respondents prefer social networking on their mobile phones.

The study has further revealed that 21% of the respondents use internet for education, 11% use it for information purposes, and 9% of the respondents use internet to entertain themselves. Moreover, 7% of the respondents use internet for all the mentioned categories.

Table 2: Table explaining the purpose of browsing internet by the respondents.

S No.	Purpose	Number	Frequency
1	Education	104	21.09%
2	Information	56	11.35%
3	Entertainment	44	8.9%
4	Networking	256	51.92%
5	All of above	33	6.29%
	Total	493	100%

Most preferred networking sites

Facebook is the most popular networking site among youth in the study area as 56% of the respondents expressed their interests in Facebook followed by twitter which has got access to 18% of the young population of south Kashmir. Furthermore, while doing the research it was found that Facebook is not a choice of educated youth only however, uneducated youth also utilize it according to their needs and interests.

Orkut is the third preferred networking site among the youth adding up 12% to the overall data. Due to its technical perspective Instagram is not much popular among the people as only 4.49% of them is using it for networking purposes. It is important to mention here that 9% of the respondents are aware about all the mentioned networking sites.

Table 3: Table explaining the networking preferences of the respondents.

S No.	Preference	Number	Frequency
1	Facebook	163	56.40%
2	Twitter	53	18.33%
3	Orkut	34	11.76%
4	linkedIn	13	4.49%
5	Any other	26	8.99%
	Total	289	100%

(Note: only 289 respondents are considered out of 493 as the rest don't use social networking sites. This procedure is applicable to the next questions also.)

Purpose of using SNS

Social networking has got a great impact on the behavior of people in general and youth in particular across the world. South Kashmir is not the exception to these changes as the study has clearly revealed the impact of social networking on the young generation of the area. The impact of social networking on the youth of Kashmir however, is different from

the rest of the world due to the political unrest prevailing in the valley. People here mostly focus on the political perspectives and use it for registering their protests and fighting for the cause of independence as a substantial portion of the population 40% upload images/ videos related to the political unrest.

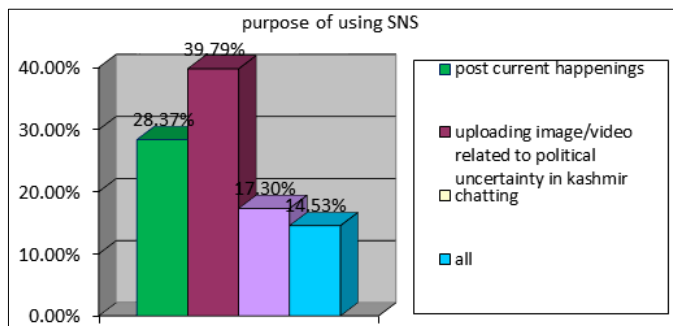


Fig 2: Chart depicting the purpose of respondents in using SNS.

Due to the advent of the social networking sites the ways of expressing the views and news have altogether changed. The research data supports the fact that 28% of the respondents post the happening of current importance on social networking sites. 17% of the youth use these sites just for the sake of chatting while as 15% of them experience all the mentioned categories. It is pertinent to note here that youth are using these networking sites to spread the information regarding encounters between the state security personnel and militants and they praise social networking due to this function.

Has it changed your life

Table 4: Table showing the percentage of the respondents felt change due to SNS.

S No.	Response	Number	Frequency
1	Yes	263	91%
2	No	26	9%
	Total	289	100%

Social networking has changed the way of thinking, behaving, extent of social relationships and has penetrated almost every life affair of the people across South Kashmir. As it is evident from the collected data that most of the respondents 91% felt changes in their lives due to social networking in one or the other way.

The study has further revealed that social networking has narrowed down the digital divide among the inhabitants of the research area and has provided an opportunity to every one for sharing their opinions, feelings, and thoughts in a democratic way.

It is worthwhile to mention here that social networking is preferred over the traditional forms of communication by majority of the youth of this South Kashmir.

Main outcome of social networking

Some years ago people of this area were restricted only to their home places and their social circle was confined to their relatives and the community. But due to advancements in the media technology people have find opportunities to widen their social spheres.

The present research supports this argument as a good number of the respondents 30% believe that social networking widens the social sphere of the people especially youth. Social networking not only widens the social sphere but is also widens the sphere of the militants as from the last two to three years there is a remarkable increase in the movement of the militants which is supported by the fact that 38% of the respondents believe that social networking has helped the militants for shaping their images and use it for communication purposes which in late nineties was not possible. Not only militants, a good portion of the youth use social networking for expressing political will and the armed resistance is greatly supported by the networking technology. 10% of the respondents think social networking as a tool for good governance while as 6% treat it as the source of disturbing social order.

Table 5: Table explaining the main outcome of social networking sites.

S No.	Outcome	Number	Frequency
1	Widens social sphere	89	30.79%
2	Leads to good governance	29	10.03%
3	Leads to social disorder & disturbances	17	5.88%
4	Helps armed rebellion	110	38.06%
5	Helps youth in active participation of political affairs	44	15.22%
	Total	289	100%

Impact of social networking on resistance programmes

Social networking in Kashmir has got diverse and multidimensional functions. In addition to the social functions it is used by the young generation of South Kashmir for registering their protests and fighting for the cause of independence. This is the innovative method of demanding freedom of their choice. A substantial portion of the population follow social networking to get engaged in the resistance programmes. Moreover more than 38% of the respondents believe it a way to get information regarding militant outfits.

Table 6: Table explaining the impact of social networking sites on resistance programmes.

S No.	Response	Number	Frequency
1	Got information regarding resistance programmes through SNS	53	18.33%
2	Joined resistance protests after getting info from SNS	104	35.90%
3	Became familiar with the militant outfit programmes	111	38.40%
4	Never joined such programmes	21	7.2%
	Total	289	100%

It is a very interesting fact that only 7% of the respondents negate the impact of social networking on their political behaviour.

Restrictions on social networking

Being a part of the conflict region, social networking in South Kashmir faces timely curbs from the authorities because of one or the other reasons. It is matter of routine now in the area as during the last three months from April 2017 to 13 July 2017

internet has been suspended 10 times which results in a great loss to the mobile networking authorities and at the same time proves fatal for media democracy. This is the reason that most of the youth cannot use social networking sites as freely as is used in the other parts of the world. This argument is supported by the tabulated data which reveals that more than 87.88% of the respondents deny the freedom of social networking.

Table 7: Table showing the freedom enjoyed by the respondents in using social networking.

S No.	Response	Number	Frequency
1	Yes	35	12.11%
2	No	254	87.88%
	Total	289	100%

Cultural impact of social networking

Table 8: Table showing the cultural impact of SNS on youth in South Kashmir.

S No.	Response	Number	Frequency
1	Has a remarkable effect	123	42.56%
2	Acts as a cultural transmitter	116	40.13%
3	Has no effect at all	50	17.30%
	Total	289	100%

Every media form has a clear binding on the culture of a society and culture shapes itself according to the media content available to that society. New media vis-a-vis social networking has got a great impact on the cultural values of any population, which is also described by the media theories such as hypodermic needle effect theory and agenda setting theory to its maximum. South Kashmir has not remained a passive spectator of the new media content but has used it and has faced a remarkable change in its social setup as is evident from the tabulated data that 43% of the respondents have experienced a remarkable change by using SNS. 40% of the youth of this area treat it as a cultural transmitter which by one or the other way acts as a cultural preservator also. It is important to note here that only 17% of the respondents negate the impact of SNS on their culture.

Conclusion

Internet has found ways to each and every section of the society and has directly influenced the life affairs of youth in one or the other way. Moreover the developments in the circumstances of the study area are inviting more and more media industries to invest in the field of their concern. A decade earlier, the inhabitants of South Kashmir were unaware about the media gadgetry which was, on the other hand, much famous in other parts of the world. The introduction of mobile phones has proven beneficial to the young generation of South Kashmir. These developments have revolutionized the media scene of the study area as a whole. The varied range of handsets attract thousands of youth to this modern media technology. Internet via mobile phone is becoming very famous among the youth of South Kashmir as 89% of them browse internet through their mobile phones. Networking is the main purpose of browsing internet on mobile phones and Facebook is the most preferred social networking site for this purpose. Social networking has changed the ideologies of youth regarding mass communication. It resulted in a paradigm shift

of youth from being passive receivers to distributors of news. It has directly influenced the ways of political engagements of youth in South Kashmir. It is used to get information regarding the resistance programmes and managing their happenings to a great extent.

The ways and means of armed struggle have also changed as most of the militant outfits use social networking for communication purposes and for making their images in the public sphere which directly or indirectly is changing the political ideology of youth in this area. Youth of Kashmir are now getting awareness about the militant outfits by virtue of social networking. The last two or three years of social networking in the area have invited more attention as for as the armed struggle is concerned which is because of the joining of tech-savy people like Burhan wani to the militant ranks.

Moreover, social networking has widened the social sphere of the young generation. It has influenced the ways of thinking, talking, eating, walking, hence changing the socio- political culture of the study area. To be more precise social networking has given birth to *Networking Culture*. Youth, irrespective of the educational qualification and family background use social networking in order to fulfill their needs and desires. Social networking has a great influence on the culture of the society as well.

Last but not the least outcome of the present research is that being the part of a conflict region social networking in the area is facing big challenges as there are timely curbs on the part of authorities hence restricting the technological opportunities for its inhabitants to a great extent.

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