



Social Media and Citizen Journalism Practices of Students in Pakistan: An Alternative Approach to Uses and Gratification

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Abstract

The rise of social media led to changes in the behavior of human communication. The social media users are easy to enjoy the contents of their choice and to share the same with others too. This astonishing transformation turned the once passive users of conventional media into social media activists. This study explored the patterns of social media usage with citizen journalistic activities and the gratification needs of the students in Pakistan. A total of 673 students participated in the survey for this study. The study concluded that most of the respondents' satisfied information, entertainment, and companionship needs through social media and needs gratification are achieved through active participation in the process of online information gathering, processing, and transmitting

Key Words: Social Media, Citizen, Journalism, Youth, Gratification, Pakistan

Introduction

Traditional mass media like radio and television are no more attractive for the people, especially, the youth as they were a couple of decades ago. The lopsided vertical flow of contents in traditional mass media with passive recipients at the other end has given way to the horizontal flow of information with active users at the ultimate end in social media systems. In traditional mass media settings, the users have no other option than to watch and listen to the contents presented by the media management except by changing the channel or switching off the system. But in new information communication systems, the users are at liberty to enjoy what and when they want to have and even to share the same with other users of the technology. It is not all over; the users of social media (SM) can generate their contents and share the same with their other counterparts. However, according to Finnemann (2002), SM has not replaced other types of traditional mass media. Rather it has integrated all other forms of media like “electronic text, the telephone, radio, and television.” The users of social networking sites (SNSs) can read an electronic edition of every newspaper, they can make easy and almost free of cost phone calls, they can listen to every radio channel of the world with much ease and convenience and can watch any television channel of their choice. Unlike the mainstream media, SM platforms offer a variety of contents that are contributed by the users themselves. Such contents may include reporting of local events, and happenings comments on various contents that are extracted from traditional mass media and uploaded online. This facility of SM has contributed a lot to its popularity around the globe.

There are numerous SNSs connecting people of the entire world but the most popular among users are Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009). Pakistani youth mainly make use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for interaction with people, sharing of contents and exchange of ideas. The popularity of SNSs has compelled researchers in various disciplines to carry out studies in their respective societies and add at least something to this newly emerging field of knowledge. This research paper aims at exploring the styles of SM usage by the university students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Pakistan and the nature of activities they do

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online. These online activities of the users are termed by various scholars as participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis 2003) and citizen journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Outing, 2005). The study also takes into account the forms of gratification the students obtain from SM usage. SNSs selected for this study include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Key Objectives

1. To examine usage patterns of SM of the University students of KP
2. To find out the nature of (journalistic) activities the students do online
3. To explore the needs the users gratify by making use of SM
4. To investigate gender differences concerning online activities and needs gratification

Social Media and Citizen Journalism

A sizeable increase in the usage of SM has been observed in the last few years around the world. It would not be wrong to term the use of SM as a global phenomenon (Mehmood, 2013). The internet took no time in shifting from mere repository of information to a social networking platform where the users are active contributors of the content than passive receivers of information (Abdulahi, et al., 2014). SM media users do comments on various contents, share self-generated audios/videos and photographs, and also do blogging. All these are contributing to traditional mass media contents and are termed as citizen journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Outing, 2005) or participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis 2003). In this process a citizen actively participates in gathering, analyzing, and disseminating news contents. Thus, the users simultaneously serve as producers and consumers of the social-mediated contents. Online sites not only facilitate users to express their minds openly but also assist traditional mass media in getting almost free of cost interesting information. Community media in particular heavily depends on SM for gathering news stuff (Allan & Thorsen, 2009).

Usage Patterns of Social Media

Most of the users make use of SM daily to maintain relationships with offline friends and to search for new friends with common interests and socio-political views (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Similarly, according to another study, 91% of teenagers make use of SM for interaction with old friends (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Research on the gender-based study about the usage pattern of the youth suggests that 46% of young male users take part in online social interaction while 44% of female users use SNSs for the same purpose. However, 70% of relatively old females and 57% of male users use SNSs for interaction with other users. The same study further found that older male users use SM for flirt and meeting new people twice as those of female users of the same age group. Similarly, the findings of the same study investigated that old female user make use of online sites to interact with people they know or meet in real life more than the younger users (Boyd 2008, p.121). Quan-Haase & Young (2010) investigated that 82 percent of the users log in to Facebook several times daily whereas; Sheldon (2008) found that over 50% of the students' login to a site several times a day. Christofides, Muise, and Desmarais (2010) concluded that young users spend an hour a day using Facebook while elderly users spent just over half an hour using the same site. The findings of the study revealed that on average young users had 220 Facebook friends while the senior users had 237. However, more than 69% of the young users have added their parents as friends on Facebook and 54% of the elderly as parents have added their children as Facebook friends. As long as a display of personal information was concerned, the survey indicated that 35.4% of young users of Facebook revealed personal information like name, age, location, etc. while 29 percent of the elderly had the same practice on Facebook.

Social Media and Online Journalistic Activities

Pempek, et al. (2009) found that watching and reading content like those on people's timelines, news feeds, and pictures shared by other SM consumers was reported to be the most preferred activities of the users. One of the most striking features of SM is considered to be the active participation of the consumers in the process of content

generation and their subsequent sharing. In other words, this technology offers full freedom of expression where the users show off their expertise and skills in the creation and sharing of a variety of contents. Benkler (2006) states that the contributions of the users in the form of content generation and sharing are normally based on reciprocation. The users usually follow each other in the mood of designing content and their subsequent sharing with others. The most experienced people among the users are supposedly followed by relatively inexperienced users. The juniors often look forward to stuff shared by the senior users. These activities on SM let users believe that their contributions are worthy which in turn help them increase their social connectedness. The same author believes that the users not only share their self-produced contents but they also associate their meanings according to their socio-cultural conditions and religious orientations to material shared by other users. Likewise, Knight and Cook (2013) note that SM offers users a safe platform for discussing various socio-political problems of their respective localities. The users of digital technology can sometimes get out of certain troubles by disclosing and discussing the same with concerned personnel. According to Schafer (2009), the main focus of the controllers of SNSs is not on the creation of contents but on building platforms where users can generate their contents and give interpretation to the already available stuff according to their needs and ideologies. For instance, platforms like “The Star Wars Mashup Editor” let users collect scripts of their choice and interests from traditional mass media and edit them according to their taste or make new content out of these. While, another similar platform “TheForce.net” extends facilities to the users to produce, promote, and amass movies of fan’s choices (Schafer 2009).

Needs Gratification: Classic Approach

Media of mass communication play an important role in satisfying the various social and psychological needs of the people. Media consumers, however, are very conscious of selecting appropriate media for meeting certain specific needs. Print media, particularly newspapers according to Bernard (1954) are used for satisfying not only information needs but also the feelings that they emerge well informed in social dealings. Radio listening on the other hand is used as “means of emotional release” and for seeking advice relating to matters of common people’s concerns (Herzog 1954).

Social Media and Needs Gratification: New Approach

The emergence of digital media brought a revolution in the uses and gratification approach. This new media encourages the creation and sharing of consumers generated material. SM caters to different aspects of human social and psychological needs. SM spontaneously “satisfy needs like entertainment, surveillance, information, diversion, escape, social interaction, identity, pastime and companionship” (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999). Likewise, Dhaha and Igale (2013) found that most of the users use Facebook to obtain escape, entertainment, information, self- expression, and pastime need. According to studies of Hargittai (2008) and Urista, Dong, and Day (2009) communication with friends and family members is one of the important needs the users satisfy by using SM. The technology of SNSs helps communities to connect and discuss issues of their interests. Usually, members of the community discuss purposes, offer direction, and social support to new members. This action not only fulfills their information, personal growth, and development needs but also serves as a bridge between active members of the community so that they could develop the community culture (Martinez & Wartman, 2009). Likewise, Tufekci (2008) suggested that most of the people use SM to satisfy their social interaction, communication, gossip, and entertainment needs. Sheldon (2008) however, noted that female SM users more often use it to keep in constant touch with members and old friends, for pastime, and entertainment. Male users on the other hand use SM mostly to find out new friendship relationships. It is concluded that people make use of SM and perform various activities of their choice. SM media in turn gratify information, social interaction, companionship, and entertainment needs of the users.

Research Method

Data was collected through a questionnaire from a sample drawn from seven universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan, Hazara University Mansehra, University of Peshawar, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, University

of Science and Technology Kohat, Gomel University D I Khan, University of Malakand, and the University of Science and Technology Bannu. In total 718 students took part in the survey. Fourteen questionnaires were inappropriately and wrongly filled that were excluded from data analysis. Likewise, 31 respondents were nonusers of social media. In the remaining 673 respondents, there were 444 male and 229 female students. The researcher made use of “Excel Sheet” and “SPSS” (version 23) for data entry and subsequent statistical data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used for obtaining data on simple statistics, frequencies, and percentages. Likewise, a simple mean test was administered to compare the means of different variables. Whereas independents sample t-tests were applied to establish the relationship of gender with online activities on SM and needs gratification.

Finding and Results

Demographic

Among the respondents, almost 66% were males whereas, just over 34% were females. Likewise, 52.5% belonged to urban areas and 46.7% were found to be rural people. The majority (64.0%) of them were in the age bracket of 18-22. In the same manner, more than 53% of the students were borders and around 47% were non-borders (See table 1).

Table 1. Demographics

		Frequency	Percent	Total
Gender	Male	444	65.9	672
	Female	229	34.1	
Locale	Urban	353	53.0	667
	Rural	314	47.0	
Age	18 – 22	431	64.4	669
	23 – 27	161	24.1	
	28 – 32	40	5.97	
	33 – 37	18	2.69	
	Above 37	19	2.94	
Status in the University	Border	358	53.2	673
	Non-border	315	46.8	

The Usage Pattern of Social Media

Table 2 reflects data concerning SM use. Around 96% are found to be users of SM.

Table 2. SM Users& Non-users (N = 704)

Do you use SM?	Frequency	Percent
YES	673	95.59
NO	31	4.41
Total	704	100

Results in Table 3 show that the majority (89.6%) of the students have accounts on Facebook followed by those having accounts on Twitter (34.5%) and YouTube (31.2%). The findings ascertain the popularity of Facebook in this part of the world.

Table 3. Favorite SNS

SNS	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	603	89.6
Twitter	232	34.5
YouTube	210	31.2

The majority of the respondents were found to display their names (79%) in their online profiles. Around 70% used to display their gender whereas, approximately (46%) of them were in the habit of displaying their picture in SM profiles (See table 4).

Table 4. Profile Information

Profile	Frequency	Percent
Display of Name in profile	530	78.9
Display of Gender in profile	470	69.8
Display of Picture in profile	307	45.6
Display of Phone Number in profile	125	18.6
Display of Home address in the profile	72	10.7

Concerning the frequency of SM use, the study found that around (27%) of the students' login to SM once a day whereas, approximately (24%) login 2-5 times a day as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Frequency of login to SM

How frequently you log in to SM?	Frequency	Percent
Once a week	115	17.3
2 - 5 times a week	111	17.2
Once a day	184	26.7
2 - 5 times a day	159	23.6
More than 5 times a day	104	16.2
Total	673	100

Results in Table 6 show that more than (42%) of the participants spent 1-2 hours a day using SM and just over (28%) of them spent less than an hour online.

Table 6. Average time spent on SM

How much time on average you spend using SM?	Frequency	Percent
Less than One hour	190	28.2
1 - 2 hours	285	42.3
2 - 3 hours	83	12.3
3 - 4 hours	74	10.9
More than 4 hours	42	6.20
Total	673	100

Online Activities & Needs Gratification

The following table reflects data concerning the online activities of SM users. Level of agreement with nine statements regarding online activities and needs gratification of the users was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Test results revealed the highest mean score for the statement - I upload anything new to me(4.73) followed by - When I need some information, I turn to SM (4.18), - When alone, I turn to SM for companionship (3.84), and - Going online is always entertaining (3.67). The lowest mean score was measured for the statement - I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM (3.62) (see table 7). The mean scores of all statements were found to be on the high side (above average). It confirms that respondents are doing the stated activities through online sources and gratify the mentioned needs.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Online Activities & Needs Gratification

Needs	Mean	Std. Dev
I upload anything new to me	4.73	0.78
I share public service messages that are found floating online	3.61	1.14

I sometimes contribute to online blogs	3.36	2.40
I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM	3.62	1.53
I always share my self-produced videos of local events and happenings on SM	3.17	1.66
I do comments on the stories and contents shared by others on SM	3.19	1.57
When I need some information, I turn to SM	4.18	1.22
When alone, I turn to SM for companionship	3.84	1.15
Going online is always entertaining	3.67	1.05

T-test: Gender with Online Activities & Needs Gratification

Independent Samples t-test was administered to ascertain gender differences concerning online activities and needs gratification. Data in table 8 reflect group statistics of the respondents and the relationship of the gender with online activities and needs gratification. The study found a significant positive relationship of gender with the statement - I upload anything new to me ($P < 0.05$ and $t > 1.965$). Male students ($M = 3.35$) were keener to express that 'I upload anything new to me than female students' ($M = 3.09$). In the same manner, results indicated the significant positive relationship of gender with the statements - I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM - I do comments on the stories and contents shared by others on SM - When I need some information, I turn to SM and - Going online is always entertaining ($P < 0.05$ and $t > 1.965$). The study, however, found an insignificant relationship of gender with the remaining four statements ($P > 0.05$ and $t < 1.965$) as shown in

Table 8. Gender and Online Activities

Group Statistics	Gender	N	M	SD
I upload anything new to me	Male	444	3.35	1.15
	Female	229	3.09	1.22
I share public service messages that are found floating online	Male	444	3.27	1.16
	Female	229	3.24	1.23
I sometimes contribute to online blogs	Male	444	3.29	1.17
	Female	229	3.21	1.22
I always share my self-produced videos of local events and happenings on SM	Male	444	3.30	1.17
	Female	229	3.23	1.22
I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM	Male	444	3.49	1.12
	Female	229	3.01	1.18
I do comments on the stories and contents shared by others on SM	Male	444	3.45	1.15
	Female	229	3.09	1.23
When I need some information, I turn to SM	Male	444	3.35	1.18
	Female	229	3.09	1.20
When alone, I turn to SM for companionship	Male	444	3.10	1.10
	Female	229	3.08	1.19
Going online is always entertaining	Male	444	3.29	1.16
	Female	229	3.09	1.20

Independent Sample Test		EV		EM		
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. 2-tailed
I upload anything new to me	EVA	0.96	0.32	2.53	626	0.01
	EVNA			2.48	383.2	0.01
I always share public service messages that are found floating online	EVA	3.40	0.06	2.21	622	0.02
	EVNA			2.12	358.3	0.13
I sometimes contribute to online blogs	EVA	1.31	0.25	1.27	622	0.20
	EVNA			1.24	381.0	0.21

I always share my self-produced videos of local events and happenings on SM	EVA	1.54	0.15	1.21	621	0.20
	EVNA			1.20	380.0	0.22
I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM	EVA	1.42	0.15	1.17	624	0.20
	EVNA			1.30	378.2	0.01
I do comments on the stories and contents shared by others on SM	EVA	1.40	0.07	1.20	622	0.09
	EVNA			1.17	380.0	0.04
When I need some information, I turn to SM	EVA	1.42	0.10	1.17	625	0.08
	EVNA			1.16	367.4	0.03
When alone, I turn to SM for companionship	EVA	0.90	0.29	2.03	624	0.10
	EVNA			2.18	373.4	0.09
Going online is always entertaining	EVA	0.66	0.21	1.57	670	0.05
	EVNA			2.08	380.2	0.02

Note: EV = equality of variance, EM = equality of means, EVA = equal variance assumed, EVNA = equal variance not assumed

Discussion and Conclusion

This research was carried out to explore SM usage styles, online activities on SM, and needs gratification of the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Almost, 96% of the respondents were found to be SM users. Once a day was login frequency of the majority of the students with 1- 2 hours was the average time spent by most of the users daily.

Facebook was the favorite site of most of the respondents and the majority of them displayed their name, gender, and own picture in their online profiles. Results suggested that most of the students were operating with genuine accounts.

Almost all students were doing online activities such as I upload anything new to me, I share public service messages that are found floating online, I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM, I always share my self-produced videos of local events and happenings on SM, and I do comments on the stories and contents shared by others on SM. Likewise, all respondents obtained gratification of information, companionship, and entertainment.

The study found the significant positive relationship of gender with the statement; I upload anything new to me, I always share my self-produced photographs of local events and happenings on SM, I do comments on the stories and contents shared by others on SM when I need some information, I turn to SM and going online is always entertaining. Results indicated significant differences in the mean scores of male and female respondents. The mean scores of males were greater than those of females. It suggested that males were keener than females to express a high level of satisfaction concerning the stated online (journalistic) activities and needs gratification.

It is concluded that needs gratification in the social media setting is achieved through active participation in the process of information gathering, processing, and transmitting.

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