THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA: NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE INTERPRETATIONS

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Abstract

Web-based social interactions are the kind of media that depend on discussion and communication between individuals or groups online. These online interactions not only enable individuals to meet and speak with unfamiliar people, but they let them know what is going on around the world. From one viewpoint, online networking has assumed a vital role in strengthening of democratic norms and creating awareness on almost every issue. On the other hand, it has been used to instigate conflict and division, by spreading misinformation and heighten tensions in fragmented societies like Pakistan, which could have far-reaching impact on national security. Hence, social media not only encourage rights' consciousness, democratic practices, communication revolution, educational excellence and political activism, but is also tainted by cyber terrorism, harassment, electronic forgery, pharming, and click-jacking. To harness this watch-dog of society for maximum benefits necessitates regulation, monitoring and early intervention, at the same time, building a better case for self–regulation. Government, media organisations and civil society together with the help of proper regulatory laws can utilize this information revolution in providing equal platforms to voices traditionally excluded from the national discourse and catering for diversity and plurality to make Pakistan a strong, progressive and democratic state.

Key Words: Social Media, Scalable Sociality, Information Communication Technology, Cybercrimes

Introduction

Today, we are part of an 'Information Society', where every individual lives two lives, a real and a virtual (embedded in information systems). The merger between information and computer networks has integrated Information Communication Technology (ICT) systems into products and domains, which traditionally functioned without them. ICT covers any item that will store, recover, control, transmit or get data electronically through computers, digital television, email, and robots. One of the major manifestations of it is the internet; a borderless ocean filled with information resources. Among all applications and usages, social media

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revolution is a fundamental fragment of internet mechanism, where people can interact freely, discuss information and share their views about everything under the sun. The technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn etc., are regarded as the fifth dimension to the existing four dimensions of warfare – the land, sea, air and space. This fifth and newest dimension of warfare has neither any geographical boundaries nor limits, penetrating every aspect of human life, including education, social interaction, law enforcement, media, diplomatic functioning-business, research, development, and military.

Social media can be defined as variety of internet and network-based technologies that allow for asynchronous and multi-dimensional information sharing, communication, and participation in activities. It can also be said that social media is 'the type of media that is based on conversation and interaction between people online.'[1]

The study in hand elucidates the significance of social media, how it interrupts the boundaries of one way communication, where current scenarios, information, thoughts and feelings can flow freely, changing the perceptions of people, leveraging visible change and offering a capability for informed and intelligent decision-making. How it has gained a vital role in starting off social movements and mobilization of collective endeavours, assumes an essential part in political and social movements, by giving individuals a stage for political and informative outpouring, and symbolic recognition for a shared cause. In various ways, social media has piloted constructive changes in the way public communicate and consume information, yet it has a shady side too. The paper also throws light on some of the frequent and commonly used ways of abuse through social networks and various risks to which social media users are exposed. What needs to be done to ensure the safety of person and personal data is also the concern of this paper, suggesting a proposed mechanism to minimize and to some extent, limit the dangers posed by this information revolution to vulnerable societies like that of Pakistani.

Social Media - Theoretical Perspective

Since the increased access to the Internet in 1960s, the networked populace of the world has expanded from millions to billions. This expanded utilization of web also brought an upheaval in the utilization of social networking. This social networking trend developed as an integral part of life and included vast online populace, ranging from common citizens , political specialists and activists to non-governmental associations, programming houses, broadcast communication firms, and governments so on and so forth. Resultantly, the correspondence canvas turned out to be more unpredictable, denser and participatory attributable to the involvement of numerous actors. Likewise, the organized online population currently can access to more data, information, public speeches and an enhanced ability to undertake challenging tasks.[2] Thus, online networking apparatuses like Email, Instant Messages, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Flicker and so on, have turned out to be central and inevitable tools of social interaction and communication in every field of life.

Prior to Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc., there were two means through which people interacted with one another, using media. The first was public media such as television, newspapers and radio. With such media, anyone as long as they had access to it, could be the audience. Additionally, accessible for a long time was media that encouraged private communication between two individuals, for instance a phone discussion, called 'dyadic' communication. In the past, individuals could meet in groups face to face, yet it was unprecedented to make group based activities inside media, for example, the phone. With the advancement of the web in 1990's, this polarization between private and public media began to change. An email could be sent to a number of people. Bulletin boards, chat rooms, specialized forums and blogging were created, which appealed to wider audience. At the same time, group media such as CB radio (a short-distanced radio communication system between individuals with limited number of channels), was developed. The initial

development of social networking sites for example, Friendster, QZone and then Facebook is a kind of transmitting or broadcasting to a limited group of people rather than to the general public at large. This broadcast in a way is scaling communication downwards. On the other hand, there are some social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Wechat, which are revolutionizing private exchanges and communications, such as telephones and messaging services, by scaling them upwards. Each and every member of the group is free to upload and post equally either a clip, an article or news bulletin to other members of the group.[3] Consequently, contribution of social media platforms towards sociality can be understood through two scales; the first scale is from the most private to the most public interaction and the second one from the smallest group of two to the greatest group of uncountable numbers. This aspect of social networking sites is attributed as 'Scalable Sociality'.[4] Janet and Daniel have graphically described the scalable sociality[5] as given below:-

Figure 1: Graphic Representation of Scalable Sociality through Social Media

Social media has passed through different stages of transformation. In this process many social media applications became obsolete and new social


networking sites were introduced. The focus is also on what developments have occurred in the World Wide Web (WWW) over the period of time to bring about transformations, which have facilitated new modes of

connection, online communication and set a tone for future events too. Generally, the social media websites include Usenet Newsgroup, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs), Instant Messengers like Skype, ezTalks, Viber etc., Friendster and Live Journal, Forums, LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, Orkut, and Twitter. These are different online forums that allow sharing of information and interchanging of articles. Most of them are used for communication and message sharing.[6] These websites were developed in the 1970s and 1980s, connecting more than 110 million users with one another.[7] Tracing back the history, Web 1.0 emerged in the 1990's and denoted the first development in the World Wide Web (WWW), which was essentially a collection of web pages interconnected by hyperlinks, but did not provide interactive content. Later, the emergence of Web 2.0 highlighted the 'second generation of web development' created by innovative specialist Tim O'Reily, where the broadcasting information was not only viewed, but could be commented upon too, so viewers had the choice to connect, collaborate and build upon thoughts and ideas to create a new generation of thinkers, idealists and learners, thus, promoting a social constructivist approach to learning.[8] Alice Caspers has described social constructivism[9] in the following illustration (Figure 2):-

Figure 2: Diagrammatical Representation Showing Difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

Oluwafisayo states that the type of technological advances that have stemmed from the implementation of Web 2.0 are regular commentary
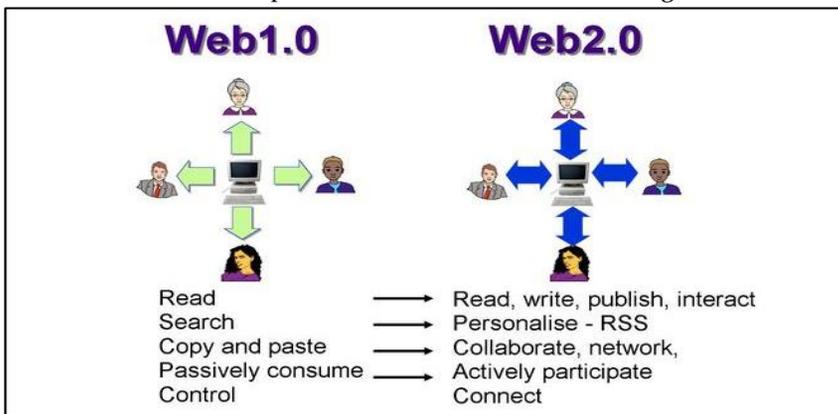
sites, such as Wikipedia, where users build upon other contributors' knowledge, podcasts and social media networks all of which stimulate world discussion and involvement. This Web 2.0 carries forward the constructivist approach to learning, because one's knowledge is enhanced by the contribution of others, creating a transformed and deeper understanding, at the same time, encouraging individuals to be in control of their own learning.[10] Bryan Eisenbergtoo, while characterising social media as an effective tool of sociality, emphasizes its importance as enabling people to create their own content according to their own knowledge.[11] Talking of the nature of these platforms, Brian Solis says the world of socialized media is not only evolving continuously, but also maturing and upgrading human knowledge, capability. It will keep on growing in so far as individuals understand that these new social instruments and systems require an altogether new responsibility and are epitome of what individuals represent and how these tools add to sociology, characterizing groups and individuals.[12] For example, Facebook is a platform which helps people to communicate online. LinkedIn and Myspace are used for professional networking, such as job searching, professional information and help in creating curriculum vitae.[13] Other websites such as Orkut, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp are used for video and photo sharing. Twitter is recognized as micro-blogging network and allows users to post approximately 140-character text messages, which are called 'Tweets'.[14] So in this digital world, once a person connects to the internet, he/she has admittance to multiple platforms that are not only global but mostly free.

From now onwards, the discussion rallies to the positive dimensions of social media.

- **Means of Education**

  Online networking is a thing that is being utilized as part of a creative way for educational purposes. Students are being educated to use this tool in a better way in classes and not just for messaging, texting or chatting. Social Media sites' usage in classrooms calls for

inspection too and in this regard it is important that school managements establish broad policies to monitor and regulate the use of social media sites in class rooms. Through social networking tools, students, parents, teachers and educators collaborate online. It also enables students doing different activities, such as blog making, development of professional links, announcements about class activities and sharing information with fellow students, educators and parents. By using social media platforms, students' awareness, knowledge about issues and their engagement in lesson can be enhanced, if teachers and school administration remain professional, by ensuring compliance to the rule that social media tools and web are used only for instruction and curriculum.

- **News Breaking Tool**

  Generally, media outlets contend to out-scoop each other yet today, if they hang on to a story for too long, they risk being surpassed by bloggers, facebookers, citizen journalists and twitterers. Online networking tools, for example, Facebook, Twitter and also web 2.0 applications like Google and blogs have changed the news business and the reporting practice inside out. They show amazing outcomes, albeit, a high vulnerability for errors. Entry to the domain of journalism is very easy now since anybody with a PC, or a Smart Phone can be their own distributer or publisher. They can blog, tweet or Facebook any material, anytime, anyplace. What makes social media exceptionally convincing to journalism is the power by which it has turned out to be a persuasive news breaking instrument. In this context, an example of U.S. State Department can be mentioned, when it requested Twitter to defer its planned maintenance on the site since it was being utilized by protestors infuriated by the consequences of Iran's controversial presidential election in June 2009.[15]

- **Word of Mouth on Steroids**

  In social media platforms, news is word of mouth on steroids.[16] For example, the news about the passing away of Michael Jackson in 2009, people on Facebook and Twitter broke the story ahead of any significant news organization. The moment the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Medical Center, made the demise declaration official, social media and news websites reported record number of people accessed these platforms in such a way that some of these websites were crashed. That instance showed how information is disseminated and consumed in social media, the speed with which it spreads and the magnitude of its influence is ungraspable. It demonstrated that the gatekeeper role is not selective of journalists, because the participatory culture of online networking has enabled everyone with journalistic traits.

- **Influencing Political Transformations**

  William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute has termed social media as the fifth pillar of state with press, judiciary, executive and legislature making up the other ones. He further said, 'we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks which can act independently of the traditional media. Highly networked individuals (helped by new platforms like social networking and messaging) can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions.'[17] Social media assumed a revolutionary position sparking political awakening and awareness among different countries of the Middle East during the 'Arab Spring' of 2010. Online networking acclimatizes individuals with a remarkable and fast mode of communication, which spread information and provided input, assembled a strong faction of activists and sped up the progress of protests, minimizing the gaps existing in their coordination, besides connecting them with the outside world. These social media featured revolutions spread like fire on multiple social networking sites and gave a chance to talk,

advance, and actualize political deliberations as full-grown movements.[18] In the 'Trump Election', the amount of fake news spread across multiple social media platforms, are numbered in so many hundreds of thousands, that they created the 'Disinformation Bubble',[19] where people were to verify and test the facts themselves not by any authentic platform or authority. Hence, this 'Post Truth' era is all about such news, which appeals to public emotion and personal belief than objective facts in shaping their perceptions.[20]

- **Shield against Sexual Harassmen**

    Social media platforms are a great way of social transformation and fighting against social ills. This realization is gaining momentum that social media is not just a game or a useless pastime and can be an effective tool in bringing about social reformation and awareness. Pakistan's first ever international social media summit featured a famous Egyptian activist Rebecca Chiao, among many other guest speakers whose online project 'HarassMap', grabbed the attention of local and international media, being an online forum operating for women, who have been sexually harassed in Cairo, Egypt. In case of any complaint, a woman can email, message or telephone through which other ladies can know the areas of danger for their safety.[21]

While talking of the positivity of social media, one cannot ignore its potential disadvantages, which pose serious threats to people and society. The hazards of social media are discussed below:-

- **Internet Addiction**

    Research has proven that social media sites can be extremely addictive. Individuals who use these sites for their daily chit chat are snared to a point that they disregard health responsibilities, particularly their eating schedule. The addictive nature of internet causes dietary issues, obesity, heart problems, disturbed sleep patterns, and other related health issues. Internet addiction is also

termed as Pathological Internet Use (PIU); this scale is used to identify people with excessive internet use patterns. These patterns include mood-altering, failure to fill major obligations, guilt and craving. In this phase, internet users get information from different websites as per their satisfaction, but in later stages of internet addiction they lose their ability to make right choices.[22] Pediatricians can help to educate people about both intricacies of online presence and the hard-hitting social and health issues that are experienced by online interaction. They can encourage families to address the issues of cyber bullying, status update syndrome, social anxiety and depression by advising them to kill communication gap existing in their homes and relationships, becoming better educated about the many technologies their partners and youngsters are using.[23]

- **Negative Impact on Teens**

  The effect of social media sites on the conduct of children and teens is very distressing. The younger lot of the general public, like children and teens, make up a very large part of the internet population. Hence, they are affected by its negative effects to a greater extent. Additionally, excessive exposure to online platforms, because of addiction to the virtual world, hampers teens from participating in physical exercises and socialization. Making contact with other people outside the social network is not necessary for them and this tendency results in their becoming socially stagnant. Trying to impose restrictions on children in using any particular online forum may not work too well, but a parent with constant involvement and participation in their children's activities will provide them much better chances keeping oversight over their online activities. At the same time, most of the people are normally unaware of the requirements for online security and, thus, become easy victim of cyber-criminals, who are out there to get benefitted from such gullible users, either by hacking their accounts or

blackmailing them by getting illegal access to their confidential data.[24]

- **Account Phishing**

  It is to phish for a person's login credentials. In online banking frauds, the attacker sets up a site that is the same as that of the login page of the focused social network website and then he/she establishes a connection to it by means of email or message purportedly from the social network itself.[25] After getting access to the target account details, the attacker can either sell the login credentials in the black market or impersonate the original account holder by sending messages to his/her friends that appear to originate from the owner. To spot such attackers is easy as the fake login sites do not have a valid SSL certificate, which is a small data file that digitally binds an online address key to an organization's details, thus, leading to detect the anomaly by the original account users.

- **Pharming**

  It is a scamming practice in which malicious code is installed on a personal computer or server, misdirecting users to fraudulent web sites without their knowledge and consent. Watch out for site URLs that use varieties in spelling or area names, or utilize 'com' rather than 'gov', for instance. It is better to type a website's address as opposed to clicking on a hyper link.

- **Cyber Terrorism**

  Cyber terrorism is the most dangerous feature of digital age, which has enhanced the influence and range of non-state actors and at the same time equipped individuals with smart technological advancements that provide ample space for terrorist organizations to thrive and influence youth for their ulterior motives. Cyber terrorism is a lethal form of cyber threat, where internet is used for recruitment, propaganda, financing, incitement to commit act of terrorism. At the same time, using social media platforms to

intimidate people for advancing religious, political or ethnic causes, falls into the domain of cyber terrorism and is punishable with imprisonment and fine in many countries of the world.

- **Clues to Conflict**

  Vulnerable societies fall victim to conflicts, social media provide seeds for clues to conflict to bring disorder in such societies. These clues can be detected through some indicators, which are divided into two categories named structural and content indicators.

  'Structural indicators' are concerned with media outlets and media professionals' degree of plurality, reach and accessibility, journalists' isolation physically and representation ally from their national and international contemporaries along with legal environment prevailing in society vis-à-vis media. On the other hand, 'Content Indicators' are helpful in detecting clues involving those subjects designed to create fear by focusing on past violence and history of ethnic hostility of certain individuals or groups and manipulating stereotypes and identities to 'dehumanise' masses, thereby, justifying injustice claiming that such acts are to be perpetrated not against any individual, but against what he or she represents. Likewise, content designed to create a sense of resignation and inevitability among viewers, leads them to discredit all other alternatives to conflict. Here, citing the example of Rwanda is pertinent, how media was used to promote violence in 1994 and a private radio station was used to instill fear of an impending attack by a Tutsi militia on Hutu people. In Pakistan, the recent killing of a PML-N worker in Sialkot, Punjab, by PTI supporters speaks volume of the hatred spread against political opponents on social media that has taken a ruthless shape.[26]

  At this point, nipping these 'Clues to Conflict' in the bud through a number of interventions may prevent vulnerable societies from violent conflicts. These interventions cum opportunities include 'Structural Interventions', which are concerned with strengthening

of domestic and international journalist networks through consolidation of independent media, free of government and pressure groups' influence, developing journalists' competence, by enhancing their physical and human resources, working with legislature and judiciary for effective laws protecting media independence and journalists along with a strong judiciary to enforce such laws needed to be employed to weaken media abuse. Alongside, providing journalists with a sense of security by consolidating domestic and international journalist networks will help them report on issues without succumbing to pressure or prejudice rather with objectivity.

The second kind of intervention is 'Content-Specific', which aims at training journalists in a manner, so that they could rise above religious, political, ethnic and regional influences to recognize the correct source of grievances of groups or people. Projecting 're-personalisation' among people and discouraging de-humanization through their writing and videos, in order to sensitize them on issues concerning other ethnicities or regions is very important. In this regard, the video 'Spacebridges' is important to cite, which provides a platform, where people belonging to opposing sides of a conflict involve in exchange of views with each other via live video chat. This kind of platform was first used during the Cold War in 1983, when members of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA) Congress interacted candidly to clear their views regarding each other. A more recent usage of the Spacebridge dialogue took place between Phil Donahue and Valadimir Pozner, 2013. The duo had hosted televised discussions between audiences in the Soviet Union and the U.S. via satellite in 1980s' and they continue doing so even today. Making an apt use of this medium, they are enlightening people across the globe on multiple world issues.

Finally, the last type of intervention is 'Aggressive' which being the last resort, calls for jamming or off-airing of those programs that promote abuse and manipulation to such an extent after which violent conflict becomes inevitable.[27] These interventions minimize and mitigate clues to conflict in fragmented societies preventing violent conflicts from taking place, thereby, making the quality of life of people better.

Pakistani society, being divided on ethnic, religious and sectarian lines henceforth, presents a case study of what challenges and opportunities social media throw at it.

Social Media – Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan

As the world is moving from traditional economic models to knowledge intensive models, Pakistan is fully poised to harness the benefits of Information Technology's ever-dynamic social media platforms' power and potentials. Approximately 60% of 200 million population of Pakistan includes youngsters. The ever increasing digital landscape of the country has created new platforms for socialization and communication not only at personal level to initiate social and political viewpoints, but also for commerce and business promotion of organizations. On ICT front, Pakistan has achieved many milestones through the successful auction of 3G/4G spectrum by Ministry of Information Technology, which has brought about a far-reaching change on the digital scene of the country, as it has increased the broadband subscriptions to almost 30 million people, which has led to internet penetration to almost 19%, which is, indeed, remarkable as compared to less than 3% in 2013.[28]

Online Networking Usage Patterns in Pakistan

The trends of online networking in Pakistan are same as that of any progressed and developed countries of the world. Facebook is the mainstream online networking site in Pakistan with 25 million users at the end of year 2016.[29] It is important to know the data regarding use of social

media platforms by Pakistanis before proceeding to challenges and opportunities, which they pose to the state of Pakistan. Table 1 is providing data regarding different social media sites usage by Pakistanis in 2015:

Table 1: Social Networking Sites Users in Pakistan in 2015

Facebook	12 Million
Twitter	3 Million
Linkedin	1.2 Million
YouTube	1.4 Million

Source: (Pakistan Annual Social Media Report, 2015)

Table 2 indicates that usage of these sites increased considerably in 2017.

Table 2: Social Networking Sites Users in 2017

Social Media Website	**Users**
Facebook	30 Million
Twitter	3.1 million
Snapchat	0.5million
Instagram	3.9 million

Source: Pakistan Social Media Users Crossed 44 million in 2016-2017[30]

Figure 3: Pakistan's Key Digital Statistical Indicators for the Year-2017

Source: Pakistan Advertiser's Society[31]

Impacting the electioneering process in Pakistan, it has been observed by many independent watchdogs that almost 69% of Pakistani males and 31% of females used social media in 2013, general elections and one of the major reasons for such phenomenal popularity of social media is the easy

accessibility of smart phones at low rates. This led to the increase in the use of social media on smart phones by a majority of Pakistani population. Social media sites' popularity among young Pakistanis has led the political parties to use them for propagation of their agendas in 2013 general elections. The success of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in 2013 elections, as the second biggest political party of Pakistan after Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, owes a lot to these platforms which have opened up new spaces for voters and enabled them to experience democratization of expression and will through Twitter, Facebook and online blogs.[32] Media industry has mushroomed immensely in Pakistan for the last ten years or so. It has brought radical changes in the existing mind set of people and has provided them food for thought on multiple national and international issues. At the same time, this digital revolution has generated more needs, which vary from person to person, ranging from entertainment to information, socialization and communication with people, being in charge of knowing more about issues to generating discussions on different contents.

It is apt to say that social media revolution has prevented Pakistani society from being stagnant and endows a vibrant and healthy form of a living society. At the same time, it has underlined that public interest is issue-centric; meaning people are more concerned about economic, political and trade issues as well as matters regarding war and peace confronting the state. Routine matters of diplomacy do not penetrate deep in public psyche. Alongside, Pakistani media, especially social media has played its role in creating consensus on key issues such as war against terrorism, shaping debates on human rights, drone attacks etc.

Having penetrated so deep at various levels of Pakistani government and society, ICT has exposed them to cyber threats and attacks too, which are used to destabilize countries. In Pakistan, damage inflicted by cyber-attacks could be much worse for not having enough cyber regulations to protect privacy and critical data. Even the most developed countries of the world got badly affected, when a recently occurred major cyber-attack

'Wannacry' wreaked havoc in United States, NHS (National Health Service) hospitals in UK and Petro China, causing disruption in vital services and resulting in a loss of income.[33] In this context, Pakistan being a developing country and literally far behind in terms of cyber security and regulations, could face dire repercussions in the face of such cyber-attacks, when necessary ICT security regulations are not enforced. So, the need is to make sure the protection of data pertinent to state, its businesses and citizens. Also, in Pakistan the way information (digital or otherwise) around public or private spheres, is handled, exposes it to dangers. There is little understanding that passing an email around on paper defeats the purpose of privacy and sensitive information can easily be leaked. Furthermore, using outmoded versions of software in a number of Pakistani offices leaves them susceptible to cyber-attacks, which may result in loss of income and disruption of vital services. To avoid such setbacks, it is important that all Pakistani government websites, computers and data must be interlinked together and be governed by a uniform and strong IT policy to guard information that is critical for national security.[34]

There is no denying fact that social media has altered the contours of public discussion in Pakistan, and highlighted issues that used to be dropped by the wayside before the opening up of ICT networks and platforms. In this respect, different public sector entities are in place to regulate, monitor and secure online traffic and services. To name a few; Ministry of Information Technology (MoIT), Federal Investigation Agency's National Response Centre for Cyber Crime (NR3C), and Pakistan Telecom Communication Authority (PTA) are responsible for regulation, protection, promotion and availability of quality ICT services across the country. People's power is growing with these ICT services and state has felt, at times, its authority threatened and has thought of to what extent citizens' practice of freedom of expression on line can be granted. Time and again Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has itself admitted the futility and costliness of attempting to enforce internet restrictions and had

admitted before the National Assembly's standing committee on Information Technology and Telecommunication that it had no jurisdiction over platforms such as the Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The PTA realistically has identified, as to where the responsibility for the effective use of social media lies i.e., with society itself. It has expressed its inability that despite having sweeping powers under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 – including section 34, which affords PTA to 'remove and block' any information, it thinks improper on virtually any pretext, it cannot control information shared on these platforms though it empowers the body to sentence people with imprisonment and fine of PKR 10 million maximum for multiple cyber-crimes. PTA appears to understand that controlling is neither possible, given the borderless nature of the internet, nor is it appropriate to enforce a regulation that has least acceptance among the general public. Barring criminal offences that do material harm to individuals and the state–harassment, identity theft, money laundering, militant activities, etc. self-regulation is the key that can work online. This may not be as neat a prescription as the state desires, but it is pertinent to recall that attempts to codify moral policing has not borne out results and had only further eroded the relationship between the people and their government and harmed the most vulnerable segments of society – the poor, women and minorities.[35] On the other hand, there are strong views in favour of regulation and monitoring of online activities, since fragmented societies like Pakistan are prone to conflicts and media especially social media are powerful tools, used by actors intending to instigate conflicts by disseminating particular messages and opinions, thereby, shaping individual's views and heightening disagreements in society. They call for media monitoring and systematic review of different social media platforms, so clues to seeds of conflict could be identified and neutralized to avoid division on ethnic, sectarian and cultural lines.[36] This monitoring mechanism should be all-inclusive, keeping all stakeholders on board, including PTA, the Internet Service Providers Association, and Pakistan Software Houses Association in concert with all the other relevant

ministries to ensure that no innocent is harassed or punished in the name of monitoring laws. At the same time, all such laws ought to be devoid of ambiguities and double meaning in order to curtail its misuse and abuse.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered for government and its related ministries concerning multiple social media dimensions in the country:-

a. It is imperative for the government to initiate a comprehensive National Information Operations Policy in concert with Ministry of Information Technology (MoIT), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Pakistan National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and Defence Committee of the Cabinet, giving guidelines to all the relevant government departments on ICT and information warfare. At the same time, involving IT industry and its activists such as Internet Service Providers Association, and Pakistan's Software Houses Associations in developing mechanisms and systems to professionally monitor internet traffic, especially the social media platforms to detect and curb seeds of conflict in society.

b. A lax code of conduct for social media already exists in the form of Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, which needs strengthening and enforcement in letter and spirit. Any ambiguity regarding ordinary citizen's liberties and punishments in the name of security must be avoided, ensuring that no innocent is subjected to abuse or harassment in the name of security protocols.

c. Key ministries involved in public diplomacy and foreign relations must be enabled to be a part of the digital transition. Government officers must be trained to be familiar with an in-depth understanding of the 'Digital Age', especially that of social media. It

will help them understand that getting the government's message across, is crucial using ICT apparatus.

d. Establishment of a 'Media Board' comprising public and government media organizations' professionals for a systematic monitoring and review should be accorded high priority in vulnerable societies like that of Pakistan. While guaranteeing application of structural and content specific interventions in media to nip clues to conflict in the bud, it would further have relevant legislation and its implementation for media independence along with safeguarding journalists from abuse and isolation. This platform would create opportunities to enhance local journalists' competence – physical and human-by jelling them well with domestic and international media networks for reporting on issues with utmost impartiality and objectivity.

e. Usage of social media sites for educational purposes must be encouraged in schools and colleges across Pakistan but institutions' management and monitoring is equally important. In this regard, professionalism on the part of principal, teachers or director is essential and their approval for selection of particular social networking sites for classrooms is mandatory. The administrator, principal, or director must be trained as to which sites to be approved for instructional purposes. Schools' social media accounts may be used to promote the institution or school-related programmes, activities and events, as well as to provide information about its schedules, meetings, and important deadlines.

f. The phenomenal growth of social media has endowed it with the title of a watch-dog of society and civil society of Pakistan can harness this watch-dog for promoting the socio-economic opportunities for all and sundry, unearthing corruption, stressing transparency and exerting pressure on the relevant quarters for good governance in Pakistan.

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