

Development of Social Media in Balochistan

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Abstract:

Social media are the web pages and applications developed to create and share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time. They play a vital role in connecting and developing relationships with people and also provide a great opportunity to establish customer service by gathering input, answering questions and listening to their feedback in educational, social and business sectors. The Internet industry in Pakistan has come a long way over some last twenty-five years when the first dial-up E-mail service was emerged. In later days, the inventions in the mobile industry have changed the dimensions of Social media and greatly reached the doors of the common people especially to young age groups. In Balochistan, although the communication resources are limited, still in most of the major cities people use WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and other social media techniques for News and communication purposes. This study will analyze the development of social media in Balochistan as means of information and communication.

Key words: Social Media, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Choti Chirya

Introduction:

Social media has become a vital part of today's society. The rapid growth of telecommunication mediums in recent years has given birth to many applications and tools for interaction of people and communities around the globe. Before analyzing the cause and effects of the social media, we have

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to take a look on the means of telecommunication applications that how they developed and raised from the past.

Many ideas about the first occurrence of social media exist. “Throughout much of human history, we’ve developed technologies that make it easier for us to communicate with each other” (Carton, 2010).

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist known by many as the father of sociology, and Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist, are considered pioneers of social networks during the late 1800s. Tonnies believed that social groups could exist because members shared values and beliefs or because shared conflict. His theory dealt with the social contract conceptions of society. Durkheim combined empirical research with sociological theory. Also, in the late 1800s, the radio and telephone were used for social interaction, albeit one-way with the radio (Edosomwan, 2011).

Then, Usenet systems were first conceived of in 1979 by Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis which let users post articles or posts (referred to as “news”) to newsgroups.

The first BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems) started online in the late 1970s. These were primarily hosted on personal machines and users had to dial in through the host computer’s modem. BBSs were the first model of sites that allowed users to log on and communicate each another, albeit in a much slower fashion than we currently do (WDD STAFF, 2009).

After BBSs “online services” like CompuServe and Prodigy were started. These were the first real “corporate” attempts at accessing the Internet. CompuServe was the first company to incorporate a chat program into their service. IRC (Internet Relay Chat) was developed in 1988 and used for file sharing, link sharing and communication purposes. It was really the father of instant messaging (IM) as we know it today. IRC was

mostly UNIX- (Uniplexed Information and Computing Service) based though, limiting access to most people. ICQ (originally derived from English “I Seek You”) was developed in the mid-90s and was the first instant messaging program for Desktops. It was at least partly responsible for the adoption of avatars, abbreviations (LOL, BRB) and emoticons.

Dating sites are sometimes considered the first social networks (WDD STAFF, 2009). The first dating sites started cropping up almost as soon as people started going online. They allowed users to create profiles (usually with photos) and to contact other users.

Online forums also played a large part in the evolution of the social web. These were really descendants of the BBSs popular in the 70s and 80s, but usually came with a more user-friendly interface, making them easier for non-technical visitors to use. After these experiments, the social media has reached to new heights and it influenced the whole world’s population. The inventions of new applications and softwares brought new trends in the world of technology, communication.

Development of Online Networks

The emergence of internet and further developments in computer technology have given birth to many social networks. The following social networking websites, blogs, and applications have changed people's behavior and life for the last thirty years.

(1) Six Degrees

This Site was launched in 1997. It was the first modern social network which allowed the users to create a profile and make friendships with other users. Although today the site is no longer functional, but once a time it was very popular. In 2000 it was purchased for \$125 million and got shutdown in 2001.

(2) LiveJournal

LiveJournal started in 1999 and took a different approach to SNS (Social networking sites). Where Six Degrees allowed users to create a basically-static profile, the other hand LiveJournal was a social network built around constantly-updated blogs.

(3) Friendster

Friendster was really the first modern, general social network. It was founded in 2002 and is still a very active social network. Surprisingly, most of Friendster's traffic comes from Asia (90% of it). Its basic objective was to be a safer place to meet new people than in real-life, as well as being faster.

(4) Orkut

Orkut, launched in January 2004, is Google's social network, and it was very popular in Pakistan, India and Brazil, with more than 65 million users. Orkut lets users share media, status updates, and communicate through Instant Messaging (IM).

(5) LinkedIn

LinkedIn was founded in 2003 and was one of the first mainstream social networks devoted to business. Originally, LinkedIn allowed users to post a profile (basically a resume) and to interact through private messaging. They also work on the assumption that you should personally know the people you connect with on the site.

(6) Flickr

Flickr has become a social network in its own right in recent years. They claim to host more than 3.6 billion images as of June 2009. Flickr also has groups, photo pools, and allows users to create profiles, add friends, and organize images and video into photo sets/albums.

(7) YouTube

YouTube was the first major video hosting and sharing site, launched in 2005. Users can upload videos and share them through YouTube or by embedding them on other websites (social networks, blogs, forums, etc.). YouTube now allows users to upload HD videos and recently launched a service to provide TV shows and movies under license from their copyright holders. YouTube's major social features include ratings, comments, and the option to subscribe to the channels of a user's favorite video creators.

(8) WordPress

WordPress is a modern blogging software, but its roots and development go back to 2001 when b2 cafelog launched by Michel Valdrighi. WordPress is a content management system based on PHP (Web Designing program) and MySQL that is usually used with the MySQL or MariaDB database servers but can also use the SQLite database engine. Today mostly websites and blogs are being developed through the WordPress.

(9) Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social networking site throughout the world. Started out as a Harvard-only social network back in 2004, it quickly expanded to other schools, then to high schools, businesses and eventually everyone (by 2006). In 2008 Facebook became the most popular social networking site, surpassing MySpace, and continues to grow. Facebook Users have a few different methods of communicating with one another. Private messaging is available as well as writing on another user's wall. Wall posts are visible to that user's friends, but usually not to the general public.

(10) Twitter

Twitter was founded in 2006 and gained a lot of popularity during the 2007 SxSW (South by Southwest) conference. Tweets tripled during the conference, from 20k per day to 60k. Twitter has developed a cult-like following and has a number of famous users (Ashton Kutcher, Demi Moore, Soleil Moon Frye, MC Hammer, Oprah, Martha Stewart, and many, many more).

(11) Instagram

Instagram was developed in San Francisco by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Instagram launched on 6th October 2010 and its growth was nearly instantaneous. It now has over 600 million active users and is still increasing quickly.

(12) WhatsApp

WhatsApp is started with former Yahoo employees Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009 that took an idea and made it into one of the most successful apps for instant messaging in the world .The idea behind the initial development was to create an app that would have a person's status beside his name. This application provide a simple interface with no ads that appeal to users, allowing people to communicate with other WhatsApp users either in groups or individually. In February 2014 the app was acquired by Facebook for the purchase price of approximately \$19 billion. To date, this was by far Facebook's largest acquisition (FWD Media , 2017).

(13) TikTok

TikTok is a short-form, video-sharing app that allows users to create and share 15-second videos, on any topic. Since its launch in 2017, the TikTok app's popularity has been growing tremendously. In October 2018, it was

the most-downloaded photo and video app in the Apple store, globally. The app reportedly has amassed over 500 million monthly active users, the US being the most popular country where it has been downloaded over 80 million times. Currently, TikTok is available in over 150 countries, has over 1 billion users, and has been downloaded over 175 million times in the United States alone (Doyle, 2020).

Besides these popular applications, there are thousands of new programs and techniques where people around the world, exchange and obtain information and knowledge. Today by the invention of 5G networks the social media tools have immensely increased their importance especially in the business market where advertisements and publicity of the product made much easier and news marketing tools have been introduced. Today social media is not being used only for socializing but also for marketing, health and education purposes.

Social media in Pakistan

Today, not surprisingly, social media is slowly getting huge in Pakistan. The country has one of the fastest-growing social mediums like Facebook and Twitter-using populations in the world, with over four million Facebook users. And, this journey began in 1992, when the internet came first in the country. Since its inception, Pakistan has developed a growing number of internet users. Social media is getting popular day by day among the youth in Pakistan. Social media in Pakistan is used for five purposes; breaking the stories that are ignored by news agencies; gather people for public protest and campaigns; highlight the issues related to humanity from worldwide; campaigner for a social cause and remove the gap between citizens and government. The first dialup internet service started in Pakistan in 1994, by Brain net, sharing a 128K link established at

Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). The state-owned Pakistan Telecommunication Company Ltd (PTCL) started offering access via the nationwide local call dialup network in 1995. After the SDNPK (Sustainable Development Network Pakistan) was found successful even more signed on for it, even those outside of Islamabad. In 1996 the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority was instituted. Following the institution of the PTA steady increases in bandwidth and delivery afforded Pakistan with easier and more accessible Internet usage.

In its true sense, Social media started after 2000 in Pakistan where electronic media has emerged widely and on the other hand mobile technology has reached the mass population. These factors gave birth to new opportunities for the social mediums spreading throughout the country. From 2000 to 2006, Yahoo, Google, IRC, and Hotmail were very popular, especially among the youth. These sites were used for Emailing and socializing but during this period Pakistan youth developed some networking sites like Cefepiyala, Gwaahi.com, Roozi.com, youthful and many others to bring new trends in Pakistani society. Blogging was also started in the same period.

In recent times, modern technologies have influenced almost all aspects of our everyday lives. The number of Social media has increased drastically and surveys show that the youth of the country has been using this medium mainly due to the increase in electronics and mobiles.

In 2006 and afterward, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have changed the concept of social media and it is now being used as citizen journalism, news, and opinion sharing tools.

The below charts show the increased number of social media users in the last one year. (Fig-1)

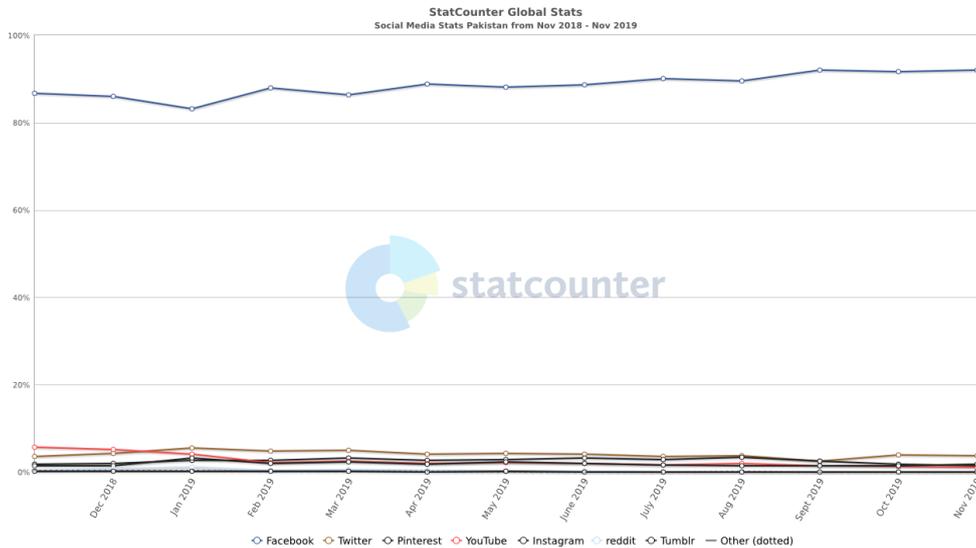


Figure 1 Social Media Stats Pakistan from Nov 2018-Nov 2019. Source: statcounter.com

Social media in Balochistan

Television has developed in the 1990s only in Quetta and some other major cities of Balochistan. Radio was the only source of news and due to Balochistan's vast area and scattered population, there were communication hurdles, even today the radio is an important source of information gathering.

Although the internet service started in 1997. Until 2003, it was only available in Quetta city. Paket service was the first internet service provider. The Internet has a source of information was used in newspapers in 2003 when a leading newspaper Daily Intekhab started publishing through website (Naiz, 2012). Later, Daily Asaap and Daily Tawar also started their web pages. The readership of these newspapers was increased

because these webpages were also accessed from abroad where the Baloch community was living.

“*Mera Quetta*” was the first website that provided the platform to the youth of Balochistan where educational activities were shared for students and masses. It became very popular when it started updating the result of matriculation and other examination related materials.

“The Baloch Haal” was the first English language online newspaper which attracted local, national and international readers and writers. The Baloch Haal also shared the opinion of writers and reports from the interior of Balochistan where traditional media was not reachable. Another English newspaper was started in the name of “Balochistan Point” but could not gain readership.

Beginning of the year 2007, Facebook and Twitter got popularity in the province and onwards it has become an integral source of news, information, and entertainment for the society. In 2014, WhatsApp application also brought new dimensions to the technology where every person having a mobile device, is a regular user of the social media. Journalistic fraternity in Balochistan also follows social media keenly to get news content for their media organizations. Most of the time announcements about political alliances and the latest political developments appear on social media which are picked up by news organizations. WhatsApp groups have become a parallel universe in terms of communication where a lot of information is shared which is useful for journalists. Social media has made the job of journalists easy but they still can't fully trust social media sources and usually double-check any information shared on social media.

“*Choti Chirya*” has created groups on WhatsApp and Facebook. It has more than twenty thousand WhatsApp members and above five lacs Facebook followers. The news regarding government machinery, administration and public are shared in these groups. *Choti Chirya* is very popular because several times the government has taken serious measurements on issues shared by this group.

Social media has also influenced the general elections in Balochistan, where most of the political parties use Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp during their election campaigns. Twitter Trend is also very popular among youth in Balochistan, and the worker of different political parties also started Twitter trends regarding different issues of politics and the general public. One such twitter trend was run by Balochistan National Party Mengal (BNP- Mengal) for the establishment of a cancer hospital in Balochistan. Later, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that the federal government will build a hospital for cancer patients in the province.

The healthcare facilities in Balochistan has never been satisfactory in terms of the facilities and conditions of hospitals. One of the big issue is of malnutrition which is always been in the news due to its alarming human tragedy. This problem was also highlighted by social media activists especially from the youth. The platform Twitter campaign was used to highlight the issue of malnutrition in Balochistan when it reached the alarming situation. Hashtags malnutrition was used on twitter to carry out the campaign.

The below graph shows that Malnutrition in Balochistan was trending topic for 14 hour in Pakistan on 21 April, 2016. (Fig-2)

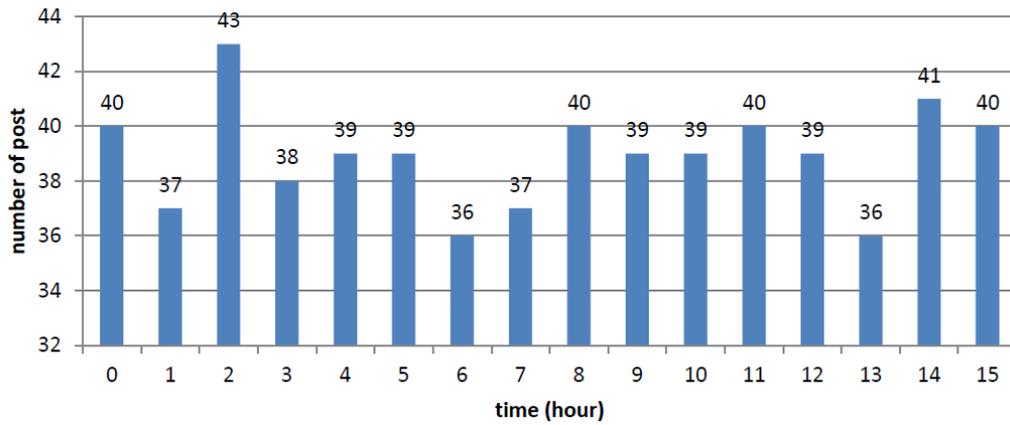


Figure 2 Malnutrition in Balochistan was trending topic for 14 hour in Pakistan on 21 April, 2016. Source: Hussain & Qureshi (2017).

In Balochistan, social media usage is prevalent in urban areas but in rural areas, its penetration is still low. Due to the absence of publicly available data about urban and rural social media users in Balochistan, it's not possible to ascertain the exact influence of social media during elections. However, by safe estimates, enough number of people in urban areas of Balochistan uses social media to affect the election campaigns. Mobile communication is not accessible in most of the area of Balochistan compared to the other part of the country, and also no availability of internet service, some areas are still lacking the facility of social media, Some districts like Kech, Awaran and Kalat are such districts where mobile internet facility is not available for masses, but it was still a remarkable influence on people especially on youth studying in different parts of the country. Today, the young generation is using social media not only for news and entertainment but also for business. Many short films have been produced from Liyari, Kech, Gwadar, Kharan and other districts which were shared through YouTube channels and they went viral. Most newspapers and TV channels have introduced online streaming channels where people can watch live news bulletins.

WhatsApp groups are the main source of information. There are different types of WhatsApp groups like business groups, professional groups, literary groups and entertainment groups where thousands of contents are being shared. Balochistan Government has many official WhatsApp groups where the Head of the province i.e. Chief Ministers administered and monitor the official activities. In a recent television interview, The Chief Minister of Balochistan Mr. Jam Kamal revealed that he alone administer more than 20 WhatsApp groups. Like same, there are different WhatsApp group of every profession and departments for smooth and quick coordination.

Conclusion

Nowadays, one cannot imagine how to catch up with friends and contacts without social networking. Although I has also affected the interpersonal communication with family and home but it has helped us become closer to friends, even when they are a thousand miles away. Through the World Wide Web, we are able to connect with people, making it easy to keep in touch with friends and family.

In the context of Pakistan social media is getting distinction day by day. Around thirty million people have been reported to be online every day and the number is increasing quickly. Likewise, there were 164.9 million mobile connections in Pakistan in January 2020 that make it the fifth-biggest cellular telephone showcase in Asia. (datareportal, 2020) Face book, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tik-tok and YouTube are presently the most broadly utilized social mediums in Pakistan with nine million clients in the nation. It has been reported that Facebook has approximately over one million supporters a month and 44 thousand new clients joining the site consistently. Face book has turned into one of the fundamental channels of

correspondence between Pakistanis living in the Gulf States, European nations and the US and their families back home.

From the perspective of Balochistan Province, where mainstream electronic and print media has no interest and local media is not strong enough to reach the people, Social media is the only source of news and information sharing.

In Balochistan, social media usage is predominant in urban areas but in rural areas, its penetration is still low. Due to the absence of publically available data about urban and rural social media users in Balochistan, it's not possible to ascertain the exact influence social media can make in elections. However, by safe estimates, enough number of people in urban areas of Balochistan use social media to make it influential in elections and other daily life issues.

The social media can be a catalyst in elimination of a discriminatory, unjust system and unquestionable authority of the ruling elite, prompting people to seek political transformation. In case of Balochistan it is very obvious according to the prevailing conditions of the province. Now it is up to the user of social media, to use it wisely and responsibly for the betterment of the society. We need to understand this philosophy that “everything in this world has its own “Adab” or manners”. From usage of a needle to usage of a super computer, everything is made for a specific reason and that purpose of creation should not be violated. We hope that these technologies will be used responsibly by the users and not for bluffing and sharing without confirmation enabling flow of authentic information, which can be used for progression.

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