

New Media Versus Old Media: A Case of Pakistan

Professor Dr Taimur-ul-Hassan

Dean of School of Media and Mass Communication (SMC), Beaconhouse National University (BNU), Lahore

Abstract

The article analyzes the way Noble Laureate Malala Yousafzai, a campaigner for women education in Swat, in northern Pakistan, who was attacked by the militants, was portrayed by Facebook users in Pakistan. The attack on Malala Yousafzai drew strong reaction from majority population in the country and the international community. It was widely condemned by the mainstream media in the country. However, after the initial outpouring of anger, different conspiracy theories started emerging, casting aspersions on Malala Yousafzai, mostly appearing in the social media, bringing the new form of media as public sphere in Pakistan to the forefront. To understand that, content analysis of picture posts on the sampled Facebook pages, dividing into 1) pictures, 2) captions and 3) text, under categories of favorable and unfavorable, has been done to know how Malala was projected. The findings are that picture posts were equal in categories of favorable and unfavorable, showing not an overwhelming bias against Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan's social media.

Keywords: Malala, Facebook, picture posts, extremists, education, foreign agent

1. Background of the Study

It was a regular day full of political rhetoric, routine crime, violence, sports and scandals of celebrities until TV channels gave the breaking news of an attack on 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai, who is an advocate of education in Taliban infested Swat. It took a couple of minutes for the TV channels and social media to bring the details of the horrific attack to the world. It began with status updates, twitter messages and quick texts on cell phones. Within minutes, the outpour of messages and news updates got viral. Tens of thousands started sharing the news over Facebook and Twitter. Right after the incident, enormous support was witnessed for Malala Yousafzai. Malala became the top twitter trend, and was also excessively shared on Facebook and discussed in text messages. The power of Facebook came to life, as people started supporting her, organizing prayer-days, vigils and sending warm wishes for her speedy recovery. But as is said, 'you do not get to 500 million friends without making a few enemies' same was witnessed in the case of Malala.

The Internet is a smart medium, used for a 'variety of purposes, ranging from enjoyment to informational purposes to communication to buying and selling products' (Kraut et al, 1997). Its power and impact can be easily seen through sites that support user-generated content, the leaders of which are the social networking sites, also referred to as SNS. Among the user-generated content sites, the position and development of social networking sites has been undeniably overpowering, especially among teens and young adults; over 55% of whom online, use social networks, and 48% of whom visit SNS at least once a day (Lenhart and Madden, 2007).

In describing Facebook, Wasike and Cook (2010) said it allows so many people to gather to communicate through a single medium. Once upon a time, it took several generations to acquire 50 million users. Radio took almost 40 years to reach 50 million users while TV took 13 years, internet 4 years, Ipad 3 years, Facebook one year and Iphone less than a year to get to 100 million users (Deen, 2011, P 8). Further, "social media's exponential growth is not a surprise when you consider the fact that it taps into something deep inside us all; the need to communicate, talk, share and be part of a community." (Deen, P 12)

Closing in on a billion users, Facebook today is the single most powerful tool holding an unprecedented power to propagate public opinion. A Facebook representative reported that 85% of students at (participating academic) institutions have Facebook profiles and 60% of them log in on a daily basis (Arrington, 2005). Facebook seems to have become an integral part of youngsters' lives; as such, the potential exists for it to have a significant impact on social practices in all walks of life and shaping public opinions. This is due to a number of factors, of which one is excessive integration of technology which has enabled us to check Facebook at any given time making it deeply "integrated in users daily lives through specific routines and rituals" (Debatin et al 2009, P 83)

Initially, it was an empowerment of a new kind; novel technology, a freedom to express, an uncensored medium to speak your mind. Hinson and Wright (2007) claimed that the development of various new technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamic new media many are using to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences. (Wright and Hinson 2007). It was indeed true for all new-media but most of all, for Facebook.

Facebook certainly provides more opportunities than creating a public profile. There is a deeper psychological element in designing user-generated content sites and social networks. It is a reflection of members' desire to belong that makes these networks such blockbuster successes. Many a viral-marketers have

explored this need or desire of their users to 'belong to a larger group with shared goals and motivations' by designing campaigns that touch a specific chord, be it religious or self-expository. Something that touches on people's hunger to be popular, cool, loved, and understood (Gangadharbatla, 2008)

As was seen in the case of Malala Yousafzai, a certain chord was struck by posting various religious posts. This also addresses engendering the feelings of affiliation and belonging, need for information, goal achievement, self-identity, values, and notions of accepted behavior (Ridings and Gefen 2004). "As Internet self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs) increases, attitudes toward the object of those beliefs will also increase" (Ajzen and Sexton 1999, P. 118). Eastin (2002) supports this claim in a laboratory experiment, in which he gives subjects with high levels of self-efficacy, assigning them a technology-oriented task, such as the electronic transfer of money, to identify whether they are likely to adopt such an online service.

Another sentiment that became one of the reasons of such outrageous posts on Malala attacks is what (Tajfel 1981, P. 255) described as 'collective self-esteem'; also referred to as social identity in psychology literature. By definition, "it is the aspect of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". Religious outfits, banned organizations, secret societies effectively use the power of Facebook in particular and social media in general to their advantage. Active members of social groups score higher on the CSES scale than do less active members. Although certain studies evaluate CSES and its relationship with user's motivation to engage in in-group preferences and their general attitude toward their group (eCrocker and Luhtanen 1990; Hogg and Abrams 1990), the relationship among collective self-esteem, group membership, and participation still remains under-researched. It is a need to belong, to jump the band wagon that makes the users gullible to ideas thrown upon them all over social media. Users Need for cognition refers to an "individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors" (Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao 1984, p. 1).

Had the attack on Malala happened in a pre-Facebook world, it would have taken days before we could hear the real story, had the privilege to show support in this very vocal way and had a chance to see what the world thought. The truth is that while online social networks differ from face to face social networks in important ways, they nonetheless function as a viable channel for interaction, opinion and approach to certain matters. With over 500 million active users Facebook provides a virtual reality in cyber space where users communicate in a focused and meaningful way (Deen, 2011)

Value of Facebook comes from its members' power to organize and respond in a public setting. As far as a community that encourages and assists political communication, Facebook has the potential to actually exceed Habermas's expectations of a public sphere and become a major hub for political action among community members (Westling 2007). The communications world is dramatically moving in a digital direction and those who understand this transformation will communicate much more effectively than those who do not (Webser, 2007)

Google executive is of the opinion that if you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet (Cohen, 2011). Indeed, Internet is one miracle that modern world has witnessed over the years. It has empowered every member of the clan to a point where debate has become rhetoric. The unprecedented support was immediately countered by some negative posts that painted the little girl as an alleged part of a global political campaign. Millions of users started stating their opinions. Shehrbano Taseer, however, had her observation about the social media's reaction that 'This time, with the attack on Malala, what is different—and encouraging—is the outpouring of support in Pakistan for this young girl. We cannot, and we will not, take any more madness' (Taseer, 2012).

The overwhelming response on Facebook indeed created an effect larger than life. The world's biggest news website, CNN's creation of 'Messages for Malala' on CNN iReport(<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/19/tech/social-media/messages-for-malala/index.html>) is just one example of the power manifested by social media trends.

2. Rationale of the Study

Social Media is the latest form of media considered to carry equal impact as other forms of media if not more. Facebook being the largest social networking website not only used to keep in touch with friends but to keep in touch with the world. Social media has the power to democratize news coverage which was clearly visible regarding the attack on Malala.

The researcher selected Facebook because it is the most visited website of the world and also the most used website in Pakistan having local traffic of almost 9 million. YouTube was banned in Pakistan when the attack on Malala took place. Also, Twitter has far less Pakistani users as compared to Facebook.

3. Research Methodology

H1 Picture posts will be more favorable and less favorable with regard to Malala Yousafzai Sub-hypotheses:

Hi There will be more favorable and less unfavorable pictures

Hii There will be more favorable captions and less unfavorable captions

Hiii There will be more favorable and less unfavorable text

Quantitative content analysis was done. Qualitative analysis was also done to enrich the research. Facebook with viral pictorial posts regarding attack on Malala Yousafzai from October 9, November 8, 2012 was the universe. Purposive sampling was done. Facebook posts, which were shared at least 1,000 times, commented upon 1,000 times and were shared by four major Facebook pages having fans over 50,000. 80 posts were sampled.

Unit of analysis refers to the type of unit a researcher uses while measuring variables or the smallest element of content analysis. The unit of analysis for this research was viral pictorial Facebook posts in the selected time period. The selected posts are divided in to two categories as ‘favorable’ and ‘unfavorable’ . A pictorial post consists of 1) pictures, 2) text and 3) caption, so they were Favorable and unfavorable were found in 1) pictures, 2) text and 3) captions. In picture, ‘favourable’ were all the posts in which people showed sympathies, lit candles and protested against the attack by holding banners in Malala’s favour. Unfavourable were posts in which Malala and her family were shown as foreigner agents, compared with Dr Afia Siddiqui, and shown drone attack victims; In text, ‘ favourable’ were sympathetic and emotional words, prayers and wishes for Malala, while ‘ unfavorable’ were harsh words like foreign conspiracy used. In caption, ‘ favourable’ were all captions which showed solidarity, sympathy, prayers and wishes for Malala, while ‘ unfavourable’ were all captions which called this attack a drama and propaganda. Inter-coder reliability was tested through Holsti formula.

4. Findings

	Favorable	Unfavorable
Pictures	41	39
Text	40	40
Captions	39	41

H1: Picture posts will be more favorable and less unfavorable with regard to Malala Yousafzai
 N=240

Table 1

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Favorable	120	50	50	50
Unfavorable	120	50	50	100
Total	240	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 Test Statistics

	stories
Chi-Square	0
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.00

Table 3 P-Value=1.00 is greater than 0.05. So, we reject H1.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Favorable	120	120	0
Against	120	120	0
Total	240		

Hi: There will be more favorable and less unfavorable pictures
 N=80

Table 4

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Favorable	41	51.2	51.2	51.2
Unfavorable	39	48.8	48.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 5

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Favorable	41	40.0	1.0
Unfavorable	39	40.0	-1.0
Total	80		

Table 6

	Stories
Chi-Square	0.050
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.823

P-Value=0.823 is greater than 0.05. So, we reject H₁.

H₁₁: There will be more favorable captions and less unfavorable captions

Caption N=80

Table 7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Favorable	39	48.8	48.8	48.8
Unfavorable	41	52.2	52.2	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 8

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Favorable	39	40.0	-1
Unfavorable	41	40.0	1
Total	80		

Table 9 Test Statistics

	sources
Chi-Square	.050
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.823

P-Value=0.823 is greater than 0.05. So, we reject H₁₁.

H₁₁₁: There will be more favorable and less unfavorable text

Text N=80

Table 10

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Favorable	40	40.0	0
Against	40	40.0	0
Total	80		

Table 11

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Favorable	40	50	50	50
Against	40	50	50	100
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 Test Statistics

	stories
Chi-Square	0
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	1.00

P-Value=1.00 is greater than 0.05. So, we reject Hiii.

Qualitative analysis is given below:

4.1 Pictures

The posts favoring Malala Yousafzai contain her pictures on a stretcher, bruised and unconscious. Images of lit candles and protests against the attacks are used; also she is compared with Arfa Karim Randhawa, a young Pakistani computer wizard who died young, in two posts which favor her. Four favorable posts used the picture showing her writing, symbolizing her struggle for education. Two cartoons favoring Malala which went viral on Facebook regarding the issue uses her struggle for education as their subject. However, the posts against Malala carry her images with Richard Holbrooke and a BBC reporter. Two posts against her used pictures of Dr Afia Siddique, jailed in the USA, raising questions like who is the real hero and did they get equal support from media, etc. To create doubts about her injury, a number of posts against her show the changed clothes on stretcher, shifting of bandage from left to right. A post shows her running for the helicopter indicating that she was not even on the stretcher. Invoking the scenes of dead bodies of children died in American drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas, images of children drone victims are used. Three posts compare her with GullLala and GulRukh who lost their leg in the drone attack. Images of a laughing US President Barrack Hussain Obama and US forces pointing guns at children and the US administration are shown in the posts belittling Malala Yousafzai. Tampering and fakeness is seen. Some examples are given below:

A post which can be seen above shows Malala running with her father for the helicopter while the stretcher is empty.

- A post shows her pictures showing her laying on a stretcher in red clothes at first but changed to blue clothes upon coming out of the helicopter while still on stretcher.

An interesting fact is that the girl in blue clothes is not Malala at all. But the picture was photoshopped in this way which led people to believe.

- In another post, bandage on her head is shown shifted from left to right.

(Anything can be shifted from left to right, right to left, up to down, and from down to up using photoshop.)

- It was claimed that she was a CIA agent as she had 'secret' meetings with Richard Holbrooke and CIA agents.

(This picture was taken out of the New York Times documentary 'School girl's Odyssey' which showed a scene of Swat IDPs having a meeting with Richard Holbrooke.)

- Picture of a girl named Gul Lala was used showing her lost her both legs because of a drone attack.

However, that girl is not a drone victim in reality.

4.2 Text

Text varies greatly from post to post. The posts that favor her carry prayers for her earliest recovery and safe life, her words for a better future of Pakistan and fearless determination for education, protest and condemn the

assassination attempt. However, the posts against Malala Yousafzai carry texts cursing her for calling the ‘Hijab’ an example of the ancient world and calling ‘beard’ a reminder of Pharaohs. A picture of her with Richard Holbrooke calls her and her family a US agent. Similarly, a post against Malala shows her and her father with a BBC reporter. Different questions were raised regarding the incident calling the whole incident to be a staged drama paving the way for military offensive in North Waziristan, a plot for Obama’s success in the US elections and to divert attention from the blasphemous film. On the other hand, a post declares that the Taliban have condemned the incident and that it is a conspiracy against them. To sum it up, the posts against Malala Yousafzai used Islamic sentiment, drone victims, Dr Afia Siddiqui and conspiracies as their tool to shift public opinion against Malala. On October 14, Ahwaal.com republished Malala’s diary with modified text which caused a huge shift in the public opinion against her. Malala was cursed, abused, condemned for writing against Islamic values which she never did, in hundreds of posts which were shared, liked and commented hundreds of thousands of times. In the coming days, these Facebook pages went on to finding multiple controversies in the incident. Some of them are as follows:

- It was also propagated that a BBC reporter used to write diaries for her and get them published. Whole of the story was knitted telling that the BBC reporter was in fact a CIA agent.
- In another post, it was emphasized that her father was a CIA agent himself and used to draw heavy amounts from USA for running a school in Swat and spying on the Taliban.
- In a post, it was requested from parents that they should up bring their children in such a way that they know the importance of the hijab and beard.

4.3 Captions

Captions vary from post to post. A caption which went viral in the early days of the incident stated, ‘We are all Malala’. Captions which favored Malala condemned the attack, showed solidarity with her and prayed for her earliest recovery. The posts against her carried captions cursing her, calling the incident a drama and also questions were raised about the incident.

It is to be noted that the posts favoring Malala were viral in the first week of the incident after which mostly posts against her remained viral. Overall the data can be divided into following

It is clear that the public opinion stayed largely in favor of Mala Yousafzai for the first four days after the assassination attempt. However, posts emerging from a few pages calling the whole incident a staged and fake ‘drama’ from the very first day. These pages included ‘Ulema-e-Deoband’, ‘My ideology is Islam’, ‘My Identity is Pakistan’, ‘Jaish-e-Muhammad’, ‘I love Islam’, etc.

To summarize the above mentioned, the sampled pages promoted that:

- This incident will be used to lay the foundation for the attack on North Waziristan.
- This incident has moved the focus from the blasphemous movie to another issue.
- Since the event took place on the eve of US elections, it must be another US conspiracy.
- Why Drone victims are not given the same importance.
- Why Dr Aafia Siddiqui was not given the similar coverage by media.
- Malala Yousafzai idealized Barrack Obama

There were similar issues raised mostly by Islamic pages in their posts for the first four days. Also, media’s role was heavily criticized.

Conclusion

Social media is becoming an important source of political communication and social change in Pakistan. Due to the restricted public sphere provided by the mass media, it has assumed the role of alternative public sphere, with more and more people joining it to express and exchange their views and opinions. Yet in the absence of any check on the veracity of information, it is perceived to have become a propaganda tool. In the case of Mala Yousafzai, Pakistan’s mass media largely spoke in her favor. The picture posts that were analyzed after staying four days in Malala’s favor started undermining the attack, casting aspersions on the whole incident. However, favorable and unfavorable remained equal. What is the impact on public opinion cannot be said as interviews were not conducted in the research but the content analysis of the picture posts did show a balanced attitude. Future research should try to measure the impact on public opinion with respect to high value issues by the social media in order to understand the effectiveness of this form of communication in Pakistan.

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