DIGITAL ACTIVISM: A TOOL FOR EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Digital Activism is a new way of protest in the present world, this has swept many wrong doers of the society through a simple click. Digitalization has given power to voice out the trials and tribulations of the people whose voices were shut for centuries, this list includes women, transgenders, gay, lesbians, race victims, caste victims and not to forget People with Disabilities. These minority groups can now easily voice their issues and can sought public support by using internet and technology. According to Wolfensen Berger, "the digital society has permitted the voice of the most marginalized to be heard." (Berger, 201) PWD have got better opportunities to live their life in an easier way through the support provided by digital technologies, and they have created a niche for themselves by using digital platforms for activism. This paper deals with various techniques of Digital Activism available for PWD to lead a better life and shout out loud for their rightful place in the society.

KEYWORDS*: Digitization, Empowering, Disability, Digital Activism, Minorities, Better Life*

INTRODUCTION

Bringing social changes is the aim of activism. The ability to speak out against injustices committed by governments and other organizations on important problems of social, political, economic, or environmental significance and, if feasible, effect change is given to people and groups through activism. By planning protests, strikes, marches, and other actions, activism used physical actions to pressing the power. However, in a society where information technology and the internet are pervasive, new modes of digital platforms serve as avenues for advocacy. To develop and continue their activities, digital activists have taken advantage of a range of digital media.
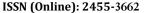
This paper explores how social media has influenced the activism. It throws light on how disability has evolved through time. The world's disabled population is currently going through extreme austerity, which has sparked a new wave of disability activism, which is being fueled by rising social media engagement. Institutions dedicated to disability activism are beginning to take a more significant role in the fight against discriminatory public policies and unfavorable disability stereotypes. This highlights the importance of public relations efforts in generating favorable views for disability demonstrations. The value of online activism is being documented and critiqued through activism. This paper demonstrates how activists have used contemporary technology as a vehicle for change while fusing theory with practical activist techniques. It also demonstrates how online activists have altered conceptions of activism, community, collective identity, and democratic change. The emergence of digital media, the conversion of "old" media into digital format, and ongoing developments in online technology, according to

Merrin (2009), have ushered in a new post-broadcast era with more opportunities for "nonelite" actors and previously marginalized groups to gain visibility in the public sphere. This paper concludes by highlighting how important it is to use a more diverse campaign strategy in order for contemporary disability activism to be noticed by traditional news media, influence policy-makers, and shape public opinion.

This paper aims to shed light on the large-scale use of digital technologies and platforms by and for the People with Disabilities to create better life opportunities for themselves. The term 'Digital' finds its origin back in 15th C. Latin language. It meant fingers or toes, and later it was used for digits. With the advent of computers in late 20th C. this term came in limelight. In present world life seems incomplete without the use of this term. World got a new impetus due to digitalization. During the tough times of Covid Pandemic digitalization and digital platforms were a ray of hope and a strong means to connect with the world. Digital Economy, Digital Learning platforms, Digital Gaming sites and even Digital marriages became the part of daily life.

For social movement of individuals and organizations, digital involvement offers new options (SMOs). Digital activism is a topic that recent IS research has started to touch on, defining, analyzing, and developing new theory to better comprehend it. Through an exploratory literature study that offers descriptions, classifications, and categorizations, this paper aims to explain digital activism.

The goal of activism (or advocacy) is to influence social, political, economic, or environmental transformation in order to transform society for the greater good. There are many

different ways to be politically active, including writing letters to the editor of local newspapers, e- newspapers, organising community meetings, marching on city streets, participating in sit-ins or hunger strikes, running online campaigns, writing blogs and articles, creating memes and gifs, forwarding mails and messages to promote certain agenda. Clicktivism, meta voicing, assertion, e-funding, political consumerism, digital petitions, and botivism are a few examples of digital spectator activities. Digital gladiatorial activities include data activism, exposing, and hacktivism. Finally, we examine the activities in terms of participants, SMOs, persons and organisations that the activities are targeting. On the processes of digital activism and their effects, we emphasise four key implications, provide four meta-conjectures, and introduce a novel concept we call connective emotion, where people digitally organise without having a physical one to one connection, but are united virtually for a common reason.

According to American Community Survey (ACS), around 95% of 3 to 18 years olds have home internet access, and in a recent interview Ministry of Information and Broadcasting secretary (India) Apurva Chandra said that India has over 1.2 billion mobile phone users and 600 million smart phone users, and 52% of the total population or 759 million people have an access to internet, (IAMAI) which makes it easier to reach this large number of populations through mobile phones and internet. This has become a favoured way of starting any campaign, a few successful examples of the same could be Black Lives Matter an online campaign to voice out the issues of people belonging to Coloured Ethnicity. This movement started in July 2013 with the #Black Lives Matter on all the platforms of social media and became an instant success. #Me Too was another phenomenal online movement against the sexual harassment of women, it created a stir across the world. It was initially started by Tarana Bruke in 2006 but it gained limelight in 2017, and now women across the world are voicing the wrongs done to them by this means of Digital Activism. Judson Jeffries, a historian of Black power, wrote that "The use of the written word, art, and culture heightened the consciousness of the Black community" before highlighting the significant significance that tangible artefacts had in the growth of the Black Panther Movement in the 1960s, it is important to quote Mislan who stated, "The print media promoted the Panthers worldwide and urged disadvantaged groups to stand together." (Mislan 67) Prior to the internet, literature and other forms of information required more material or physical coordination. Digital activism, in contrast to conventional activism, has been able to undermine the authorities' monopoly on information transmission. Additionally, it has democratised power and access to formerly restricted groups. Digital activism facilitated the organisation and participation of common people in social movements.
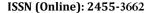
Traditional and digital forms of advocacy are frequently combined. Digital Activism proves to be beneficial, as it breaks the cage of authority or monopoly of a specific individual or group, it comes forward as a consolidated voice of entire collectivity facing some issues and problems. This form of activism can not be supressed or shut down using any sort of repressive agencies such as police or army. Deibert and Rohozinski say, "no other mode of communication in human history has facilitated the democratization of communication to the same degree." (98)

Role of Digital Activism for People with Disabilities

People with Disabilities suffer great difficulties at the hands of their own family, relatives, society and community. They are seen as a burden to be carried on by the family. They are considered as evil doers of past births, no good is ever attached to them. No body, not even their family wants to talk about them to other people in society. Their problems and difficulties are always hushed under the carpet, they have no voice of their own and even the Government has not done anything significant in order to help these people. According to the report provided by Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (New Delhi), "out of the total population of 125 Cr, 2.68 Cr persons are 'disabled', that makes around 2.21% of the total population. In Indian Social Makeup People with Disabilities are taken as evil doers of the past birth. According to *Karmafal Theory of Mahabharata*, they are said to have performed very heinous deeds in their past births that is why as a result to their past karmas they are made to suffer this punishment in this birth. They are marginalized in various categories, made fun of, given no respect and participation in the society. They suffer exclusion from main stream society, they are considered harmful or unsafe for other people in society. They suffer inequality and discrimination on the basis of their disability. Society gets insensitive towards the fact that PWD are also humans and they have feelings and emotions, they are either compared with or termed as animals. They are provided with no economical support to pursue education and hence are removed from cultural, political, social and economic mainstream of the society. This marginality becomes their destiny.

Digital Activism can prove to be a boon for People with Disabilities. This could be used as a strong means to bring positive changes in their lives. By using various tools and digital platforms such as X formerly Twitter, Face Book, Instagram, Threads, YouTube, Wats App and many more their voices can be raised in the society. By using digital tools and online mass media a social stage could be set to showcase the problems and challenges of People with Disabilities. This can lead them to be an active participant in the society, they can be termed as an equal and responsible member of the society. This will add value to their lives and will give meaning to their existence, they no more will be taken as a burden or responsibility. Digital Activism will not only voice their concerns but also will provide them with active roles in the society. According to Social Role Valorisation Theory (SRV) propounded by Wolf WolfensenBerger, "the enablement, establishment, enhancement, maintenance, and/or defense of valued social roles for people--particularly for people at value-risk-by using, as much as possible, culturally valued means." Hence by giving valuable roles to people with disability, a significant change can be brought in their lives. This could easily be possible with the help and assistance of Digital platforms. The various means of Digital Activism are creating and popularising online content for spreading

awareness for Rights and Equality of People with Disability. Thoreau Goggin discussed the advantages of mobile Internet access, as well as online support groups for individuals with disabilities in his celebrated works on role of Digital Activism. (Goggin 77)

Policy Advocacy: A major change could be brought by contacting the Policy Makers of the National and International Institutions and Organisations through sms', e- mails, online surveys, reports, social media messages and urge them to make policies and implement laws that benefit People with Disabilities.

E- Campaigns: Social Media Platforms act as an easy means to connect and spread the message quickly. Movement like #WeThe15, which was started at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, has sparked change over the years by assembling the largest ever coalition of multinational groups from the sports, human rights, politics, media, business, arts, and entertainment sectors and has bought them together for one common aim. 15% of the total population of the world is having one or the other form of the disability, and these people with disabilities desire real change to end unfairness and inactivity at a time when diversity and inclusion are the talk of the day. This is a movement that all people with disabilities can support just by a click, this is a movement that will voice the concerns of PWD, similar to movements for issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. This is a worldwide movement promoting accessibility, inclusiveness, and visibility for people with disabilities. Due to the efforts made by this movement there is an increasing understanding of the obstacles and prejudice that people with disabilities encounter on a daily basis everywhere in the world. This movement gained a quick success due to its online promotion and viewership. Other such movements and campaigns could also be started to include people with disabilities in the mainstream society.

Online Advocacy Tools: There are a number of online tools available to transcribe and provide captions that makes the content friendly for People with Disabilities.

Online Petitions: Many online petitions are started to support various issues in the society, many people actively participate in those and try to bring a change. Such a petitions can be raised for advocating equal rights for People with Disabilities and can be brought to the attention of Policy Makers. E- Signatures could be used to mark the participation of the supports.

Online Training: Online training could be given to PWD and others in the society, webinars, workshops, training sessions, talk shows and speeches could be arranged online that could be easy to access for People with Disabilities. These platforms and techniques could be beneficial in informing and creating awareness about equal participation and presentation in the society. Various apps are available that are providing phonetic version of any written text, so that people with visual impairment could easily access that and make proper use of the same.

Digital Sharing: Inspiring stories of People with Disabilities, who have overcome this otherness in the society, and have created a place for themselves could be circulated online, so that others can take inspiration from them and take risks of creating their own space in the society. These small steps could bring major change for them.

Collaboration and Networking: Digital networks and platforms could be created to bring people together. Groups on Facebook, Wats App, Instagram and Telegram could prove beneficial and efficient for sharing information. Collaboration with various online tags could promote the cause of People with Disability.

Johnson and Moxon have emphasised the potential of digital activism to boost the influence of disability organisations in policy-making and encourage civic participation among people with disabilities (Polat, 25). The value of online media for users who are disabled can be better understood by these findings. He also discussed how online communication may act as a stimulant and multiplier for social interactions among impaired users. Currently, a variety of academic fields, including as anthropology, sociology, political science, media and communication studies, as well as art and design studies, are studying digital activism.

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