Review of Popular Hashtag Movements on social media

*Devika Chhibber, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi

Abstract:

The concept of Hashtag is relatively common worldwide since the expansion of Digital media interfaces and growing use of Smartphones. As per 2020 report of Statista, the smartphone penetration has grown to million marks user base, and it is projected to grow even higher to hundred million in the coming years which simply means that the coming years are going to witness more digital interactions and networking. These days networking on social media is expanding to massive levels with the use of hashtags. The term Hashtag is used specifically on different social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. Users generally put hashtags to increase the reach of their posts or to determine or follow the trending topics, themes. It helps in discovering user specific content. The concept of Hashtag activism or movement refers to the act of gathering public support over internet platforms. It does not require mere sharing, liking or retweeting instead simply a common Hashtag is used with symbol "#" before the post. Such hashtags are further used by other netizens to spread the word about trending topics. In the present paper researcher has purposely selected a few Hashtag movements related to social issues. The purpose of this study is to identify and evaluate popular Hashtag movements in India. Nine Social Media Hashtags movements are purposively selected by the researcher to evaluate and discuss the significance of Hashtags.

Keywords: Hashtags, activism, Netizens, social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Introduction

The evolution and growth of new media technologies have paved ways for more digital participation and interaction in social movements and issues. One of the common reasons is that social media is available for free and there is no formal prerequisite for commenting, participating, or interacting through social media. People from different walks of life follow, share, comment or express themselves through several social media platforms viz Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. Dynamics of social media have now evolved from like, share to #Hashtag. With the use of this Meta tag a user can simply follow the trending topics or user's interest-based topics or issues. Various studies have discovered that online mediums are the

most significant tools to impel people to participate in the online movements let's take the example of 2012 Nirbhaya case, apart from people protesting offline, large number of people protested and participated online where many users changed their Facebook and WhatsApp profile images to "black dot symbol". This can be considered as one of the massive participatory digital movements in India where several online petitions were made.

Online social movement can simply be defined as the movement where people from unknown networks or outside your digital network reach out collectively to follow shared interests and beliefs. This further helps in building massive public support and such online social movements also promotes participatory dialogue among different users.

Talking about Hashtags, the hashtags were initially introduced on Twitter Platform and is also now commonly used on Instagram and Facebook as well. The first Hashtag was used in the year 2007 by Chris Messina "#thing for nerds". He is the creator of #Hashtags on social media. Hashtag movements are still a newer thing in India as compared to the international scenario where #BringOurGirlsBack, #BlackLivesMatter #PrayForParis #NotMyPresident, #BendtheKnee etc are already an uproar and netizens are more proactive in spreading the word through Hashtags. Some popular Hashtag Movements:

#Hok Kolorob

India witnessed its first Hashtag movement in the year 2014 #Hok Kolorob which was initiated by students of Jadavpur University in Kolkata. This Hashtag movement was initiated online through Facebook platform where many students posted several pictures and videos with the Hashtag #Hok Kolorob which means **Let the Voice Raise**. The Hashtag movement was initiated due to an on-campus molestation faced by a female student by a group of male students in the University. The Girl student further faced mental harassment by members of enquiry committee. Enquiry Committee emphasized more on question of the clothing or attire of the girl; instead of acting against guilty. It created a spur amongst university students and professors. In the month of January many students went on to "Fast unto Death" strike. Following which a quick action was taken against the concerned authorities. The movement lasted four months.

#HeForShe

#HeForShe was initiated by United Nations in the year 2014 in concord to gender equality. This was a global initiative to promote and uplift performance on the basis of Merit and not on the basis of gender. The logo of this movement symbolised union of both the genders working together to have a progressive working environment. Campaign was initiated to curb the gender inequality. Several studies have revealed that around 95 percent of hierarchy positions are headed by Men. The Hashtag focused on more progressive approach of non bias on the basis of gender. The #HeForShe campaign speech on its launch day in 2014 went viral and it received around 3.8 million views. Several men posted the message in favour of Gender neutrality on their social media handles in support of the #HeForShe

#LahuKaLagaan

This Hashtag movement was started in April 2017 by a Women rights NGO Shesays which means Tax on Blood. The movement was launched right after the release of GST Tax by the government of India in which sanitary pads were introduced in the tax slab of 12%. This Hashtag movement urged people to Tweet #Lahukalagaan to the then Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitely to make sanitary napkins in India Tax free. Undoubtedly India has a massive progressive and technical developmental rate but still if we talk about such important social issues like menstrual hygiene. There are still so many rural sections which are deprived of sanitary napkins in India. Out of 336 million menstruating women only 36 percent use sanitary pads. Lack of awareness and affordability are the prime reasons why a lot of women in India face urinary or reproductive infection. This initiative was positively mobilised by different social media influencers and celebrities like Mallika Dua , Cyrus Barocha, Aditi Rao Hydari. This Hashtag received positive response on different social media platforms and on July22, 2018 government of India categorised Pads in Tax free category.

#AintNoCindrella

This Hashtag movement was launched followed by the comments made by a political leader on an incident that took place in August , 2017 when a Chandigarh based DJ was chased in a car by two youngsters where the Politician blamed the girl for driving out so late, instead of addressing the larger issue . The politician mentioned that girls should not go out after midnight. These comments received several flaks from the online community. A lot of females posted pictures on their social media handles with #AintNoCindrella and these pictures were

posted majorly only after or around midnight. This hash tag movement led by females across India was widely covered by Global Media such as BBC, The Guardian and several Indian media channels and called out a debate for women safety and women curfew in several prime-time debates. Hashtag was able to achieve its purpose of creating a stir in the thoughts of netizens against patriarchal mindset.

#NotinMyName

The movement was initiated in 2017 through a Facebook post by Film maker Saba Dewan followed by lots of mob lynching cases in India. One such incident happened in Ballabgarh, Haryana where a 15-year-old boy was killed by a mob allegedly as they claimed him to be a beef eater because of his Religious identity. This brought international level protest by Muslims and Dalits across the country were posted online pictures protesting against name and caste-based prejudice. Further the same hashtags were prominently used in 2018 after the emergence of Kathua and Unnao Rape cases. Various celebrities viz. Swara Bhaskar, Kalki Koechin, Kiran Rao joined this Hashtag movement demanding justice. This online movement was well received which eventually led to PM's official statement on twitter stating no person has the right to take law in their hands.

#MeToo

This two-word Hashtag was the most widespread Hashtag across Twitter. #MeToo was first used and created in 2006 by social activist Tarana Burke. The Hashtag caught its momentum in October 2017 when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted "If any women has been sexually harassed or assaulted write #Me too. This Hashtag received record breaking usage to 4.5 million times in just eight hours. In India #Metoo garnered its public gain only after a year in October 2018 by actress Tanushree Datta where she accused fellow actor for Sexual harassment. Apart from her various other celebrities like Navneet Nishan, Sandhya Mridul singer Sona Mohapatra, etc took to their social media spaces and shared their story with #MeToo.

#LoveisLove

This Hashtag was popularly used on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram after the Supreme Court Ruling Decriminalised Homosexuality in India in September 2018. Followed by the Supreme Court's ruling several Celebrities and netizens took over this to their social media handle and

expressed their joy in the favour of equality of Right to Freedom. Nationwide #LoveisLove trended across Twitter apart from this #Loveislove campaign drifted its prospect to LGBTQ community to love beyond boundaries of Religion, Skin Colour, Size, Age and Gender. Till date this is one of the most commonly used and trending Hashtag movement which is frequently used in almost every social media post. Famous celebrities like Farhan Akhtar, Karan Johar, Swara Bhaskar, Ayushmann Khurrana , Konkana Sen Sharma etc followed the #loveislove in their posts along with the pictures. Several marketing companies like zomato, CCD took to their social media handles and posted creative #love is love posts.

#StayatHome

The beginning of the year 2020 brought a major change in our lives. The pandemic outburst worldwide bought a nationwide lockdown in different countries. Talking about India the lockdown was introduced from March 24, 2020 and was extended time to time as required. At that point of time nobody was prepared for the lockdown, some people were stuck away from home, many were self isolated and apart from that there were so many other financial challenges. It was during this time social media witnessed #StayAtHome #SocialDistancing #StaySafe trending on different social media platforms. Where a lot of users posted their pictures inside their places and ensured that the safety can only be achieved by #StayingAtHome. Apart from netizens several marketing companies promoted the idea of social distancing through their creative social media posts #StaySafe #SocialDistancing. Following this common #StaySafe hash tag various celebrities trended other hashtags related to #staySafe like #DilseThankyou for Medical Staffs for their endless service and support in combat against covid-19.

#Tractor2Twitter

This is the latest in the row the movement launched in November 2020 started off by Ludhiana based IT professional in support to the ongoing agitation amongst farmers country wide against newly introduced Farm Laws. Apart from offline mobilisation the Hashtag got its momentum after getting #Tractor2Twitter support on different social media sites by various users in and around the country. Along with this popular Hashtag, several other complementing Hashtags are used like #isupportfarmers, #SpeakUpForFarmers, #standwithfarmerschallenge, #FreeFarmersFromCorporates all these online and offline movements have already bought two times #BharatBandh in the country. If we look closely at this ongoing Hashtag spur, we could

see it has created a debate and discussion among various communities. Several celebrities, opinion leaders, influencers have entered war of words on Twitter and Instagram in support or against the bill with several similar hashtags.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this review was to analyse and discuss the presence of #Hashtag based activism in different movements initiated in India. Researcher has observed that since 2014 all the movements selected have caught mainstream and global media attention. For some of the Movements like #LahupeLagaan and #Loveislove we have seen a positive response from the concerned authorities like the removal of Tax on sanitary pads, removal of authorities in case against sexual harassment in University, Supreme Court ruling etc. On the other hand, some Hashtag movement had quite uproar but were unable to make any major visible mark in the society like #AintNoCindrella #NotinmyName #HeforShe they were short lived Hashtag movements which caught public attention and grabbed headlines in mainstream media. However, if we critically analyse, we can simply ascertain that all the selected movements were able to make their mark by involving attention of public or users towards concerned issues. Several online participatory forums are created online to follow the ongoing issue. Hence, we cannot deny the fact that people have now become more vocal and expressive on their social media handles through these hashtags. Hashtags are the new emerging tools which hold an immediate public attention. It also symbolises #ManyVoicesOneWorld where the developing economies only grow better and best when there is better communication among different cultures, communities, tribes etc existing within a country. A better and proactive mass communication through Hashtags can certainly act as a catalyst leading to better and more aware society. In the above discussed movements, we can clearly see the impact of mass participation bearing fruitful results. However, many critics are in the view that digital activism or Hashtag Activism has short shelf life and is confined to mere participation leading to Pseudo effect only. But one cannot deny the part that Hashtag movements create a communicable forum involving participation beyond boundaries of Time, Space, Location.

References:

1. Ahmed, S., Jaidka, K. and Cho, J., 2016. Tweeting India's Nirbhaya protest: a study of emotional dynamics in an online social movement. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(4), pp.447-465.

2. Goswami, M., 2020. *(PDF) social media And Hashtag Activism*. [online] ResearchGate. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326655352_Social_Media_and_Hashtag_ Activism> [Accessed 16 December 2020].

3. thing, W., 2020. *Why Online Protests Are Set To Be The Next Big Thing*. [online] The New Indian Express. Available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2018/mar/18/why-online-protests-are-set-to-be-the-next-big-thing-1788771.html> [Accessed 10 December 2020].

4. Razo, V., 2020. *Understand The Versatility And Necessity Of Hashtag Activism*. [online] Learn.g2.com. Available at: <https://learn.g2.com/hashtag-activism> [Accessed 10 December 2020].

5. The Rise of Social Movements Through Hashtags. 2020. *The Rise Of Social Movements Through Hashtags*. [online] Available at: <http://www.changemag-diinsider.com/blog/the-rise-of-social-movements-through-hashtags> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

6. Statista. 2020. Smartphone Users 2020 | Statista. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/330695/number-of-smartphone-users-worldwide/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20smartphone%20users,the%20100%20 million%20user%20mark.> [Accessed 08 December 2020].

7. Tribuneindia News Service. 2020. *Youth Trend Hashtags In Support Of Farmers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/youth-trend-hashtags-in-support-of-farmers-180202> [Accessed 15 December 2020].

8. Rishi Iyengar, C., 2020. *India Scraps Controversial Tax On Sanitary Pads*. [online] CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/22/health/india-tampon-tax-intl/index.html> [Accessed 08 December 2020].