

Social Media and One-Way Flow of Information: A case study of Muslims and non-Muslims Facebook participation on Paris Attacks

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Abstract

This study is an analysis of Facebook posts and comments shared by Muslims and non-Muslims after the Paris attacks of 14th November 2015. The comparative analysis is important as it will provide insight into the Muslims and non-Muslims reactions on the attacks. Content analysis of 500 posts from the hash tags with names #condemmparisattack, #prayforparis and #parisattack on Facebook was conducted. Quantitative analysis was done to measure the frequency of post shared by Muslims and non-Muslims. For Qualitative analysis, comments with the posts were analyzed. Results show that Muslims were more active in terms of their participation in both posting new material and commenting on already posted material than non-Muslims. Muslims show their solidarity towards Attacks whereas non-Muslims were more critical and blamed Muslims for the attacks.

Keywords: *Comparative Analysis, Critical, Qualitative, Quantitative.*

Introduction

In contemporary age, technology is assumed to determine most of the issues being highly important or having minor worth. In this era of global relationships, where world is interdependent, international communication has become essential ingredient with the use of technology for mutual interaction and understanding (Ozuru & Ekeanyanwu, 2013). This trans-border communication among different nations is articulated with the notion of freedom of information. But on the same time, this freedom of information has constituted disparities among the nations. Communication scholars (MacBride & Sean, 1981; Okigbo, 1996; White, 1988; Wu, 2000) from time to time, are struggling to overcome these diversified discrepancies. Pattern of flow among developed countries and developing countries is eminent communication problem. This pattern of flow has been named the one-way flow of information. This flow of communication has been prominent during colonial era and was used for cultural and linguistic patterns to keep hold on socio-political and economic ties with former colonies (Nnamdi & Yusuf, 2013).

Developing nations are part of this flow but unfortunately they are only the receivers of the information, there exists excessive imbalance in this flow of communication (Kraidy, 2002). This one-way flow of information preserves the dominance of developed nations over underdeveloped nations to keep occupancy on socio-economic resources and structures. This interpretation holds the idea that all of it is in this way to have controlling and power bearing role in international communication by developed nation (Ekeanyanwu, 2013).

Such discrepancies advanced the pavement toward building the McBride Commission in 1977. As Thussu (2000), illustrate the four reasons for setting up this commission, the problems faced by free and balanced flow of communication, linking the needs of developing countries with free flow of communication, the framework for NWICO (New world information communication order), and media being vehicle to solve the world problems were the apprehensions behind the commission. In this McBride commission, it was reported to the UNESCO forum that a deliberate attempt has been observed by the developing countries which intentionally mistreat their advantages being superior in economy and technology (Hanitzsch, 2009). This notion asserts that developed countries perpetuate their dominance over developing countries in quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Momoh, (1988), states that it is common impression as news from under developed countries usually get considerations when they instigate curiosity for the viewers of developed countries media. Moreover, Peterson & Sreberny (2004), stipulated the argument with the idea that inadequate biasness has led the global cooperation towards certain attitude of prejudice that discourages the coordination and integrity on international level.

For an exchange on broader level, the commission proposed things that could help to open up new sources and horizons for vast flow of opinion. Internet has brought a vital change in this flow of communication in the form of Social Media Networks (SMNs). As compare to traditional media, SMNs provide more space to its users for taking benefits from free flow of communication (Nnamdi, et al., 2014). It provides wider space for people to use it for sharing their expression of views both on personal and global level within a short time period. As Ozuru & Ekeanyanwu (2013), argues that SMN has invigorated the dissemination of information because its magnified nature of getting instant feedback has made it more interactive and participatory. Mitu (2012), says about the utility of SMN such as Facebook, My Space, Hi5 and Twitter as many users in their personal lives have integrated it.

Chang et al., (2000), has discussed the dominated notion attached with the one-way flow of information by the western side. He says that through one-way flow of information, western imperialism is being carried out with what is going on and what is going out. With the development of engagement of social media platform, people of developing countries tend to control the information by holding ownership on content to represent themselves and others.

The current study evaluates the potential use of free social media to understand if the one-way flow of information is still the part of this technology-oriented era. Facebook content has been analyzed to view the participation of Muslims and non-Muslims over the issue of Paris attacks occurred on 14th November. Through this it will be to analyzed that one-way flow of information is still the part of this global era. If this is so, then the study will help to understand that the use of free social media is not being properly used and unable to bridge the gap from North to South. It will also indicate the preference of most of the nations over the global issues if they are not participating willingly.

The study is important, as it tends to evaluate the existence of one-way flow of information in this age where vast technology is assumed to overcome all of the bridges and gap between developed and developing countries. In this technology-oriented era, with the emergence of social networking sites, the concept of global village has been transformed into global room (Chalaby, 2005) which let people to avail the opportunity of getting and receiving free flow of information though social media. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze if developing nations are going to play their part in this free social media by sharing their point of view.

The objectives of the study are;

- To explore the frequency of posts of the Muslims and non-Muslims on Paris attacks.
- To find out the responses of the Muslims and non-Muslims regarding Paris attacks.
- To learn the status of the theory of one-way flow of information in the age of free social media.

Literature Review

Although, the study is about analyzing the one-way flow of information in this age of free flow of social media and researcher relates it with the existing literature of use of social media on different incidents that yield to have vigorous impact globally intending to influence international media. So the existing literature will help to understand the utility of social media and understanding of its users.

On analysis of Social media content on Facebook, most of the research studies examined the content quantitatively indicating the pattern of interactions in form of discussed topics and number of responses with theme analysis (Brewer & Rickels, 2014).

Enoch, (2013) has pointed out the changed arena that has been brought by the influence of Social Media Networks in the flow of international communication. This influence constrains the idea of extensive interactive and participatory nature of social media network encouraging citizen journalism. In addition, he argues, that the issue of imbalance flow of communication among the nations remains constant on international level (ibid). Further, he gave suggestions for third world nations to rebrand their image through using social media networks. Enoch, (2013) says that with the advent of Social Media Networks, international communication has gone under enormous change. This change, he further argues, have led the international communication towards the state of fluid because the pattern of typical situation covered in SMNs with comparing the situation in traditional media that has changes the concept of journalism into people journalism. He argues, “with the current realities, being merely opinion dominated by traditional media has changed the theory of agenda setting. Instead, SMN is playing its role to turn its users being more active in exposing their ideas” (ibid).

Most of the researchers have associated the notion with agenda setting theory as Wanta et al., (2004), described about the nature of perception of US audience by sharing the research regarding the agenda setting influence on giving the coverage on foreign nation news. Researcher argues that more positive coverage given to foreign nation led the audience to perceive them as important news and negative coverage led the audience to think of the specific nation under the same course presented to them. On another unique angle Parashar et al., (2015), identified the strategies that western media usually practice. CNN and BBC treated invasion of Iraq as “Liberation Mission” and then same vocabulary was used by Iraqi newspaper that was dependent on US news agency. Another example used for terrorists and their groups was “social force” or “nationalistic movement”.

Trevino (2000), embraces the research in international communication through an integrative theoretical model using the three interdependent approaches of choice of media, attitude about the media and its usage by the side of users. He proposed the idea that there are multiple factors to influence the communication if we study the users media attitudes and behaviors. New media considered as social media were also influenced by person or technology interaction factors. Sinebare (1997), has coined the two terms ‘information rich’ and ‘information poor’ countries for defining the gap between these nations and contended that most of the time received information is culturally irrelevant. In the same regard Lee & Brownlee(2007), pointed out the under-developed countries being passive information recipients who view the dominant ideas of manufactured content in form of culture that do not relate with them. The use of Twitter being the important vehicle of social media has been analyzed in research area as Lotan et al., (2011), described the intensifying role of Twitter by playing timely information across the globe during Tunisian and Egyptian revolution in 2011. As being the part of information flow, duplicate tweets

executing through other forums were analyzed to differentiate among user types and pattern of sourcing. In findings, researcher analyzed the reciprocal relationship among media outlets and individuals being key player for sharing information on Twitter. Moreover Lee, & Ma (2012), worked on finding the factors that influence the people to share something on social media. A survey was conducted from 203 students in a local University and it was revealed that the respondents were driven by gratification of information seeking, socializing and status seeking were more likely to share in social media platform.

Hamdy & Gomaa, (2012) researched on the use of social media linkage with the theory of framing using a unique dataset of Arabic language content. Traditional media framed the event of Egypt’s uprising as a conspiracy of the government and social media posts used human interest frame by calling it a revolution for freedom and social justice. Findings illustrate that social media can play a vital role during political crisis. Eltantawy & Wiest (2011), demonstrate that social media played an instrumental role in the success of anti-government protest that led to the resignation of the dictator during Egyptian revolution. Thus, the studies from different perspectives of use of social media reveal that if the social media is used with proposed purpose having full potential then it can have vast global impact. Current study will help to explain if the one-way flow is still there among the different nations and most of the issues are not being highlighted from North to West. If this is so, then one can argue that there is need to understand the disparities created by this technology and sorting out its solution.

Methodology

content analysis has been applied in the study, quantitative technique of content analysis is used to analyze the frequency of participation in sharing the posts and comments. Qualitative content analysis is used for analyzing the comments stated by non-Muslims regarding the Muslims and Muslims regarding the attack.

Table No: 1

Categories	operationalization
Conflict	Comments that are based on disengagement represent disrespect, tend to arise a clash and attack on faith of others
Reconciliation	Comments based on mutual acknowledgement of each other’s opinion, finding common moral basis for peace, tend to get involve in acknowledgement of responsibility and establishing patterns for mutual cooperation
Solidarity	Comments in which trustworthiness is highly prominent, showing alliance with French people and shared photos of French flag on display pictures of Facebook user
Defensive	Comments based on sharing the quotes from Holy books and presentation of counter arguments for attack on ethnicity, religion or culture.

Research Questions

- RQ1. What is the frequency of participation on sharing posts on Paris attacks between Muslims and non-Muslims?
- RQ2. What is the frequency of participation in commenting on Paris attacks between Muslims and non-Muslims?
- RQ3. What are the responses of non-Muslims in comments on the shared posts regarding Muslims on Paris attacks? (Qualitative)
- RQ4. What are the responses of Muslims in comments on the shared posts regarding Paris attacks? (Qualitative)

Table No 2: Variables of the Study

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Frequency of participation on sharing Facebook posts by Muslims and non-Muslims on Paris attacks	Number of posts shared and commented by Muslims and non-Muslims on Paris attacks
Response in form of comments on the shared posts by Muslims and non-Muslims on Paris attacks	Content of comments in form of used language and expressions by Muslims and non-Muslims on Paris attacks

The universe of the study is the social networking website “Facebook” and the time period for the selection of the content is from 14th November 2015 to 30th January 2016. Three types of hash tags to gather the posts related to Paris attacks. These hashtags are #parisattack, #prayforparis, and #condemnparisattack. Units of Analysis for the study are the posts and comments shared by the Muslims and non-Muslims on selected hash tags regarding Paris attacks during selected time period. N is 500 posts shared by Muslims and non-Muslims regarding Paris attack from selected time. In total 4127 comments on 500 posts were analyzed, 88 posts from #condemnparisattack, 250 posts from #parisattack and 162 posts from #prayforparis.

Findings and Analysis (Quantitative Analysis)

This section is based on quantitative analysis, where Muslims and non-Muslims have analyzed number of posts and comments in response to the Paris attacks.

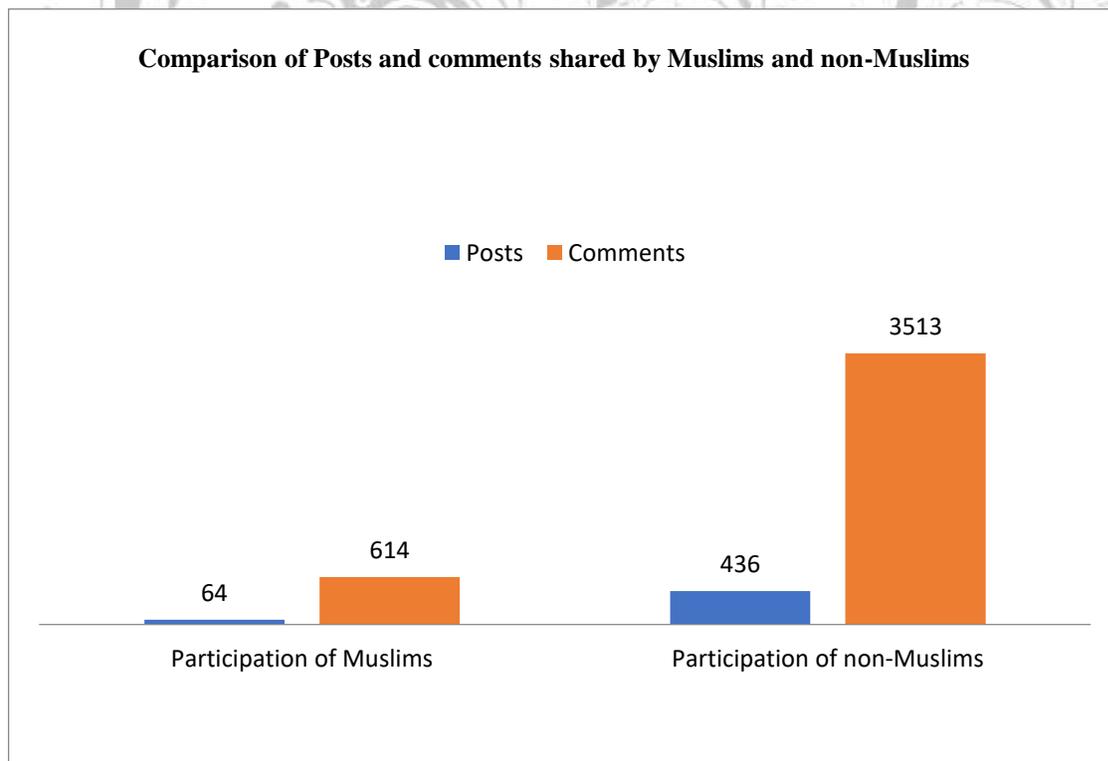


Figure 1: Comparison of Posts and comments by Muslims and non-Muslims

It is evident that Muslims shared only 64 posts and non-Muslims shared 436 posts out of 500 on the whole regarding Paris attacks on Facebook. There are only 614 comments by the Muslims on top 10 comments and 3513 comments of non-Muslims

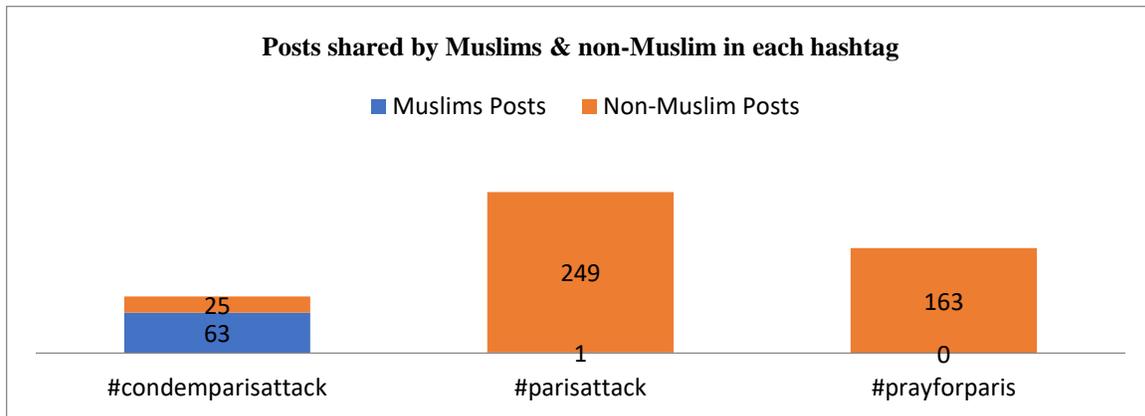


Figure 2: Comparison of Post shared by Muslims & non-Muslims in each hash tag

In above mentioned figure, there are more posts of Muslims in #condemnparisattack as compared to non-Muslims that are 63. In #parisattack, Muslims representation can be seen on very low level with only 1 post and non-Muslims with 250 posts. In #prayforparis there are 163 posts of non-Muslims and Muslims have not a single post shared.

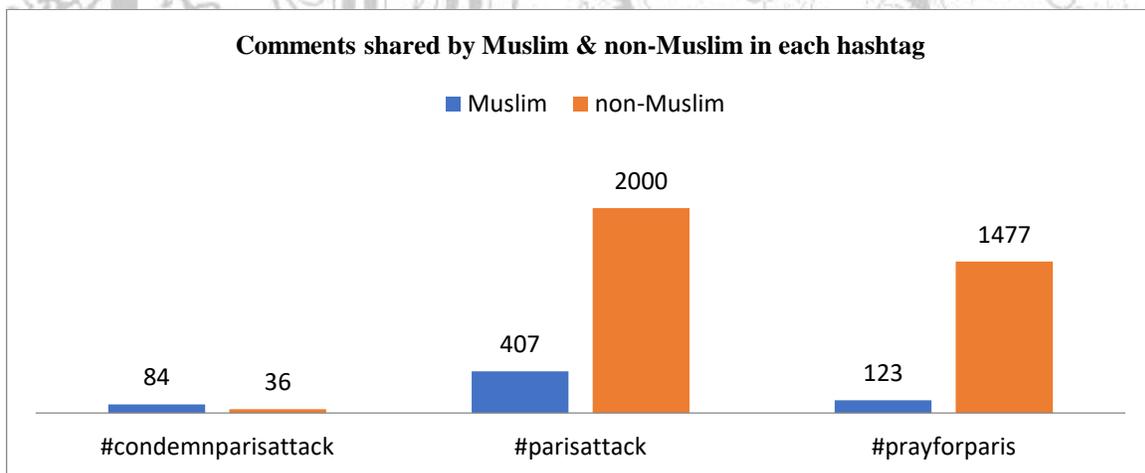


Figure 3: Comparison of Post shared by Muslims & non-Muslims in each hash tag

Above mentioned figure illustrates that in the #condemnparisattack Muslims shared more comments than non-Muslims that are 84. In #parisattack, non-Muslims shared more comments than Muslims that are 2000. In #prayforparis again, non-Muslims shared 1477 comments that are more than Muslims comments.

Qualitative Analysis

The second section is based on qualitative analysis. Through extensive study the shared comments by Muslims and non-Muslims are divided into these category/frames.

Analysis of comments of non-Muslims regarding Muslims

For analyzing the non-Muslims comments on Paris attacks, three main frames having sub-categories were used. This categorization helps to cover all of comments under these three frames.

Conflict

There are number of posts that show the arousal of conflict and wording that is used is somewhat not appropriate. These comments are mostly by the side of non-Muslims used for the Muslims. Most of the comments comprise on the content based on imposing severe allegations on Syrian refugees for the attacks that is not more than flaming the emotions of Syrian nation. As its evident in the quotes given below.

Nick Eftychiou; Sky news why don't you report the fact that one gunman came to the EU from Syria via Greece claiming asylum? You were quick to report that thousands were poor refugees in boats...wonder how many more of these so-called refugees are in fact terrorists...

Like · Reply · 384 · November 14, 2015 at 9:43pm

On the other hands, observations says that there is severe attack on the faith of Muslims calling them extremists and presenting different types of extremist Muslims. This phenomenon of name-calling is observed in most of the comments.

Sarthak Upmanyu; Difference between Extremist and Moderate Muslims 1. Extremist wants to kill you and Moderates want extremists to kill you 2. Extremist- we will kill all kaffirs. Moderates- I do not support killing but Biradar is right.

Like · Reply · 16 · November 14, 2015 at 7:19pm

By categorizing the Muslims in the form of extremists, conflict is being aroused by the side of non-Muslims.

Another example of these comments targeting the ethnicity of the Palestine while arguing that the attack on Paris is attack on humanity and it is of more importance than attack on Palestine. There are two important things observed in the study regarding non-Muslims comments. For up healing the conflict, their language and tone of discussion matters a lot. Most of the comments are harsh using inappropriate language. Their tone seems involving hatred meanings in words. Under language and tone, religious discrimination has been viewed that most of the time lead the discussion towards being severe talk.

In number of posts and comments, suggestions were given on banning the European border for Syrian refugees for the entrance to European countries. French people seem more uncompromising over the issue. It is observed that whole French community is being given a wake-up call for standing against the Muslims and religious extremism.

It is observed that Muslim countries have to face severe allegations for feeding terrorism including Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan and all the Middle East and Asian countries having Islam as national religion. On such impositions by the side of non-Muslims, that there should be ban on preaching of Islamic teachings. Such solution has been presented by number of non-Muslims to eradicate f terrorism.

Reconciliation

Not only the conflict arousing against the Muslims has been the prevailing trend during Paris attacks remained dominant but most of the non-Muslims also reconcile with the Muslims while acknowledging that all of the Muslims are not terrorists and they should not be targeted as whole. In comments, numerous non-

Muslims are of the view that even if these terrorists belong to the Muslims community, we must not hold all of the Muslims. There are number of posts where many of the non-Muslims have stated harsh comments about the Muslim who tried to defend themselves or condemn the attacks. But at the same time there are comments of non-Muslims replying to the same comment in number of ways to prevail the idea that all of the Muslims should not be targeted. Following comments show the feelings of understanding with the Muslims.

Vladimir Panić; Why don't you do the same for the innocent people who were killed in Lebanon or Syria? Or are they not important enough coming from a 3rd world country.

Like · Reply · 196 · November 15, 2015 at 4:21pm · Edited

Response of Muslims regarding attacks in comments

Conflict

In content analysis, it is observed that to some extent, comments of Muslims have been a reason for creating the conflict. As the following comment is imposing direct allegation on Israeli Govt and defining its relationship with the same country.

Usman Choudhary; ISIS: Israeli Secret Intelligence Service

Like · Reply · 1 · November 18, 2015 at 6:03pm

It shows that Muslims comments also seem biased while imposing allegations. But when it is compared with the comments of non-Muslims, their comments seem harsher.

Solidarity

On the account of solidarity, most of the Muslims are viewed sharing their comments with the feeling of solidarity. Their views expressed with French people is all about sharing their grief and being the part of their situation. All of the posts sharing solidarity with the French people are about condemning the Paris attacks too. Examples of such types of comments are written below.

Naveed Murtaza; We, Pakistanis are with Paris. May God bless Paris. Really a moment of silence for humans

Like · Reply · 476 · November 14, 2015 at 6:02pm

Paris was described as war zone within hours after such coordinated attacks, and on reaction it received the millions of comments of solidarity from all over the world. On the name of solidarity, millions of people changed their display pictures on the chance given to Facebook users to overlay the French flag in support for the victims and their beloved. In most of the comments, Muslims also mentioned their suffering from savage terror as how they, too, have been enduring for many years.

Reconciliation

It is observed in content analysis, that most of the comments of Muslims hold the idea of reconciling with the French victims in Facebook comments.

Ahmed Majeed Syed; I am Muslim I know what Islam teach Islam dint say killing innocent women's children kidz ant etc this not Islam

I will pray for Paris people and I condemn the attack in Paris

Like · Reply · 1 · November 14, 2015 at 8:31pm

Such posts on Facebook advocate the notion that their beliefs do not coincide with the extremists or terrorists. Killing of innocent people has been condemned and focus is upon claiming that Islam does not teach violence against anyone. On the whole, all of the Muslims seems willing in their comments to eradicate the label of extremism from their religion and also from victimized countries. At the time reconciling with the French people about the attack, there have been seen number comments describing the situations of all of the Muslims in all over the world.

Defensive

It is observed that most of the Muslims have been in defensive position while remaining in the state of reconciliation. In most of the comments by the side of non-Muslims, Muslims are targeted for being the charge of terrorists and for this are accused to bear the suffering in form of harsh dialogues and sharp views. Most of the Muslims seem defending themselves for the cause of their religion through quoting from the Holy book 'Quran'.

Moreover, Muslims seem defending their positions through such war words by reminding non-Muslims regarding attacks on Muslim countries as well. Their comments compare the severe devastating and pathetic situation in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Beirut, Iraq and all over the middle east countries where Muslims are fighting against extremists.

In many comments, hypocrisy of Western imperialists is discussed being selective on humanity. Because most of the posts on Facebook from international media condemned the attack on Paris but ignored the recent attack in Beirut happened a day before the Paris attacks.

On the account of Facebook display picture option to change it for showing the solidarity and sympathy with France in form of French flag, most of the Muslims have commented this biasness of Social Media for providing the option only for French attacks. Muslims in their comments expressed their feelings to take the initiative to change the display picture of Facebook profile for an attack on Muslims countries as well.

Following quotes depict the exact narration of Muslims feeling while at the state of being defensive.
Abdul Samad; Don't use word "Islamic" with terrorist.

Like · Reply · 395 · November 15, 2015 at 3:52pm

لَطْفِي مَذْمُومٌ

; If anyone kills an innocent person, it would be as if he has killed the whole of mankind."
(Qur'an 5:32)

I'm Muslim and I know my religion very well. Islam doesn't teach terrorism, to kill or to destroy. Terrorism has no place in Islam. killings of any innocent people is unacceptable.

Before you blame Muslims for the attacks in Paris, remember that ISIS has killed over 100,000 Muslims in the past 2 years from emoticon
ISIS is created by the western powers
You can't put blame on people within few hours of incident without knowing who is behind this coward act who motivated them.

Like · Reply · 1,211 · November 15, 2015 at 12:07am

Discussion

This study tries to find out the participation of Muslims and non-Muslims on Facebook in sharing and commenting on posts related to Paris attacks. By analyzing this, the purpose was to discover the status of the concept of one-way flow of information. Through a comprehensive study, it is revealed that overall out of five hundred posts analyzed, representation of Muslims (North) seems very rare consisting of only sixty-four posts. Non-Muslim's (South) participation seems covering major part in all of the hash tags.

Upon the results concluded from the observed posts in terms of sharing and commenting, researchers conclude that there is still information gap on sharing the ideas by the side of North. Researcher relates the phenomena with the concept of one-way flow of information that argue the information is passed on from bigger to smaller countries and from those with power and technological means towards those less advanced. Even from developing to the developed world and on the whole, from power centre to downwards. Upon this interpretation of one-way flow of information, researchers construe that even in the age of free flow of information where users of social networking sites are increasing in numbers day by day, there is still the existence of one-way flow of information. In this flow the information is going from top-down and developing countries are merely receiving the information with an insufficient margin of participation (Fuchs, 2010).

There are various reasons both inside developing countries and on international level that prevent the social media for counteracting the one-way flow of information. Within developing countries, communication facilities are generally incompetent and inadequate because of lack of resources. From a particular standpoint, imbalance of information flow has its roots in developing countries as well (Charbonneau, 2008). The dispersion inside the North between well-off minorities and deprived majority limit the size of communication on larger scale. Therefore, on whole, there is a smaller number of Facebook user accounts of Muslims from developing countries. Another reason of one-way flow of information is the dominant political forces of underdeveloped countries to restrain the flow of communication between developing countries towards developed ones.

This quantitative imbalance in flow of communication is basically the reflection of world's dominant political and economic structure. This structure tends to maintain such dichotomy to continue the dependency of developing countries over developed countries. (Hedley, 1998). Similar approach is viewed in this study as well. In current study, the imbalance in quantitative measures shows that even if there is free social media, where anyone can have account of social networking sites, but still information sharing gap exists. North side is countering the status of one-way flow of information, but it will take time to tackle this communication problem.

Although the purpose of the study was just analyzing the status of one-way flow of information but after studying the content of comments, the potential existence of the concept of Othering was revealed. Non-Muslims comments depict framing conflict and reconciliation in their used words for the Muslims whereas Muslims comments depict framing conflict, solidarity, reconciliation and being defensive. It is observed that the depiction of Muslims and Islam construct them as 'Other'. In comments, Muslims are considered as immature who need to settle down themselves for constructing their own reality. It is revealed that the dialectic between 'Us' and 'Them' is very prominent in the used language in comments. As far as the language is concerned, intolerable language is used for Muslims and Islam regarding the Paris attacks. Majority of the comments directly linked the Muslims, Islam and terrorists with each other in terms of attack. The term 'Islam and Muslims' is used in many comments as adjectives as 'Islamic fundamentalists', 'Muslims extremists' and so on. Such comments aid a lot in reproducing negative stereotyping of Muslims and Islam because there do not include a range of opinions of Muslims themselves. The comments based on Muslims arguments are just exposing the solidarity and reconciliation while defending their identity. But still, there is not sufficient response to counteract on the comments by non-Muslims.

On the other side, 'moderate' and 'modest' terms are used to describe the Muslims and mentioned in those comments that seek to reinforce that all Muslims are not terrorists. Although the non-Muslims and Muslims are reinventing such identity as well, but still, there is need of more participation of Muslims on such platform to construct their own realities.

Conclusion

The study analyzes that participation of Muslims and non-Muslims on Facebook in terms of sharing and commenting posts regarding Paris attacks. It revealed that participation of Muslims in terms of frequency of sharing and commenting posts is very low whereas non-Muslims participation is higher. This phenomenon depicts that there still exist the one-way flow of information pertaining the idea that free flow of communication could not overcome the gap of information sharing yet. On qualitative measure, non-Muslims comments are depicting the Muslims as being 'Other' because of the stereotyped images. Therefore non-Muslim comments reinforce the dichotomy of 'Us' and 'Them' with radical tone. Due to the lack of participation by the Muslims in sharing and commenting on posts, their representation is being spoiled because of the used adjectives as 'extremists' and 'fundamentalists'. On the other side, Muslims reconcile in their limited comments to express their solidarity with French community. Upon shielding their image, Muslims have used religious quotes to defend their identity, but due to inadequate participation of Muslims, these voices remain behind the curtain.

Limitation and Future Study

In this study, there are several limitations. Researchers took only 500 posts and first 10 comments of each post for study. In future, posts can be increased including more hash tags. Another limitation is that according to the estimate, there could have 5000 comments on the basis of 500 posts with firsts 10 comments. But researcher could find only 4127 comments because there were few posts that were not commented neither by the side of Muslims nor the non-Muslims. In future, other vehicles of social media can be observed including Twitter for the holistic view.

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