Citizens' Role in Nation Branding: A case of Pakistan in terms of Women rights and girls' education

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Abstract

Brand image is as important for a nation or country as it is for products and companies. Social Media has enabled the citizens to play a significant role in branding of countries and promote their positive image. Pakistan is portrayed negatively in terms of women rights and girls' education in the world. This study aims at finding out the role played by social media users in order to portray a positive image of Pakistan through their tweets regarding women rights and girls' education. Through the content analysis of 449 tweets, the findings indicate that Pakistan was promoted as a country not giving rights to women and girls. The negative repute of the country needed the attention of Pakistani social media users in order to paint a praiseworthy image.

Keywords: Nation branding, social media, Pakistan's image, Women rights, citizen role

Introduction

Nation branding and Social Media

As the brand image of any company or product is necessary for its success and promotion, the good reputation of a country is essential for its progress and prosperity. According to magic bullet theory, the audience perceives the reality as it is shown by the traditional media. But the later theories have negated the 100% impact of media. The social media, which has made possible the free flow of information, has also limited traditional media like newspapers and televisions in shaping public opinions. The youth has become very much dependent on this medium for acquiring and sharing information. Social networking that was introduced in 1988, has altered the functioning of almost all fields of our life (Arandilla, 2012).

The SNS's sites have evolved into a mechanism for breaking, sharing, and contextualizing news where more than 500 million global users now post more than a billion messages, photos, and links each week (Holton et al., 2014). The motivations behind these

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posts are not confined to day to day frivolous conversation and chats rather they are used for various other purposes. The users have adapted the platform as a space to break and contextualize news and have aided in the evolution of useful tools that help them manage and share information which turns out to be a great tool in portrayal of a country or nation.

Owing to this power of social media, the positive and negative, both types of information about a country can reach, easily, to millions of people in a very short time. The smart phone technology has made this thing even easier. As, Holton et al. (2104) say that social networking sites like Twitter are being used and accessed through mobile phones and thus the ability to quickly seek and share that information is magnified. There are now 845+ million users on Facebook (Eldon, 2012), while Twitter has about 1 billion accounts and similar is the stats for other sites like Google+, YouTube, MySpace, LinkedIn and the ilk . Millions of people log in to these sites and share news and their views every day. This is because the social media enables audiences to reach to a vast and enormous knowledge almost at no cost, as compared to traditional media. This means that any negative news has the potential to reach to a very vast audience if spread through social media. Even the blogs have become comparatively more powerful than that of traditional media in setting news agendas (Meraz, 2009). According to Drezner and Farrell (2004), when popular bloggers focus on a neglected issue, they socially construct the agenda that makes the mainstream media focus on that issue too.

So, consequently, the country branding is also very much dependent on social media platforms. Primarily, Facebook and Twitter. The perception about any nation or country is built through actions of governments and the inhabitant communities as well as the events taking place in that country. But again, this perception owes a lot to how the traditional and social media portray the happenings. The hash-tagging and trending on Twitter have taken the place of headlines on a traditional newspaper. One must not forget the proverb "perception is reality" and that is why governments as well as citizens need to play their role in order to promote a good picture of their country. While government agencies work on their own desks, social media has provided every citizen its own desk to contribute his part in the progress of his country.

Pakistan and Women rights:

It is true that in Pakistan, women are living in a miserable condition where they are killed for honor, attacked with acids, facing domestic violence and harassment at workplace. This is what the traditional media keeps us telling all the time and the same picture is framed on social media, but, this is just one side of the picture. The Pakistani government is taking steps to improve the condition of women. The violent crimes against women are tried under Anti-Terrorism Act. Similarly, any culprit of honor killing is made to be punished in prison for seven years or even death penalty is imposed in extreme cases. The bills like Protection of Women Rights Bill, Prevention of anti-Women Practices Bill, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012, Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010', and 'Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011, passed during recent years save women from vaani, swara, karokari, forced marriages, marriage with Quran, violence against them and grants them the right to inheritance in property. It also makes them more safe at workplace and outside (Sheikh, 2011).

Apart from passing bills that provide them with protection, and rights there are various other programs that provide them economical support. Shelters such as DaarulAmaan, provide food, security and boarding place to many insecure and homeless women in Pakistan and all are run by the state. The Women Entrepreneurship Initiatives, is another program aimed at improving the state of women in the country and works for their economic development by providing them various facilities to run their own businesses (SMEDA, 2014). Many NGO's are also working in Pakistan to ensure maximum provision of facilities to the women of under developed areas. The women in Pakistan are also serving military, health, politics, law, economy and Parliament. Seventeen percent seats are reserved for women in the parliament (National Assembly). Several women are working as ministers in the cabinet too. Similarly, the struggles of Pakistani girls to go to schools and educate themselves despite of opposition from society as well as their own family members is worth praise. But, only the negative side of Pakistan is highlighted. This image of Pakistan, as third most dangerous country for Pakistan is not only visible in mainstream media, but also the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Pakistan and Girls education:

Pakistan is also one of the countries which are known for not providing even basic education to girls. But, the scenario changed much after attack on Malala Yousafzai. She was a student in Swat district of Northern Pakistan and was shot by Taliban. The main cause was her raising voice for girls education and rights. After that attack, she began to work even more on this issue. She also won a noble prize in 2014 on her struggle against the suppression of children and their right to education. She was eleven years old when she began writing for girls rights and has now become a leading advocate throughout the world (NoblePrize.org, 2014).
The United Kingdom's Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who is also the special envoy for global education, launched a petition in United Nations in her name demanding that al the children worldwide should be admitted in schools by the end of 2015. Thus the struggle of a Pakistani girl became the voice for the education of all the children outside schools. Similarly, at her address in the united nations in 2013, she spoke for the education of not only Pakistani children but the children of whole world(Rebecca et al. 2013).

She has been won many prizes from 2011 to the date that are continuously earning Pakistan a positive image. Some of these awards are International Children's Peace Prize (2011), National Youth Peace Prize (2011), Anne Frank Award for Moral Courage, January 2012, Sitara-e-Shujaat, Pakistan's third-highest civilian bravery award 2012, Mother Teresa Awards for Social Justice, November 2012 and many more.

The aim of this study is to find out what role are the social media users playing in creating a good image of Pakistan in terms of women rights and girl's education. As already mentioned, citizens can play a significant role in nation branding when they have the powerful tool like social media in their access. A real life example is that of Hasbara initiative taken by the government of Israel, in which university students were encouraged and paid to post positive things about Israel.

Literature review

Today, there is a great interest in marketing the characteristics of nations as brands in the international market and according to Lundholm (2012), new media can be a positive force in creating national identity. She asserts that 'nation branding' occurs when

citizens communicate with others about how they view their country. She further says that active participation of citizens in debates about national identity, through digital media, can challenge the prevailing negative stereotypes about a country.

The brand image of any country is made by the opinions the public keep about it (Anhot, 2005). The concept of measuring global perceptions of countries in dimensions like culture, tourism, governance, investment, people, exports, and immigration was developed by a branding expert Simon Anholt. According to him, it takes about 15 to 20 years to build the reputation of a country. But, according to Warren Buffet (2010, as cited in Tuttle 2010), it takes only five minutes to ruin that reputation.

Kimonye (2014) in her article explains how, the disasters and other events occurring in a country that can ruin its image, can be controlled effectively. She emphasizes on sharing the positive content about a country on social media as it makes it easy for the users to share that content and shape the public opinion. According to her, social media provides a virtual community center where people from around the world communicate directly with each other which can thus help in making a good image of their nations. Similarly she says, that as the governments are playing their own role, citizens can play a powerful role, and she advises the citizens to support the governments' efforts and spread positive message about their country through all communication platforms and social media is the most freely available platform for even the lay men.

This power of citizens to act as an country ambassadors on social media was effectively used by the Israeli government which recruited students to portray a positive image of Israel through Social Media. This initiative was named as Hasbara and Sheizaf (2011) reports it as an initiative to spread positive propaganda about Israel through social networking. In Hebrew the word Hasbara means "explanation". Israel needed it to justify their behavior with the Palestinians and their occupation of the Palestinian territory. It was aimed at international audience in western countries primarily. It included usual advocacy efforts, and general appeals made through media and was carried out by lobbying groups, government agencies, private citizens, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, students and bloggers.

The government encouraged the citizens to actively engage in the initiative and provided them with guidelines on how to defend their country abroad. Hasbara was probably the most widespread and ambitious propaganda effort run by any state in modern world. It was an effective initiative and in its continuation, the government planned to recruit students too to achieve its goals.

The students were paid for carrying out that PR campaign of Israel. As Ravid (2013) wrote about Israeli government's new step in continuing Hasbara activities by involving students as 'covert units' in their efforts to defend Israel on social media. The students were supposed to post on the channels like Facebook and Twitter on the behalf of their country. There was an estimated investment of NIS 3 million to organize, recruit and fund the activities of these university students.

Sherriff (2013) added in a report in Huffington Post UK that Israel's initiative to recruit students required them to keep their identity hidden. The students would receive scholarships on their task to engage international audience in their program to spread positive information about Israel. For five hours a week, they were supposed to get $2000. Israel not only used it to garner itself a positive image, but to defame its opponent, that is, Palestine too. Thus Israel was not only countering the negative views but also working at the same time to disrepute its enemy through social networking.

Research Questions

Q1. Are the tweets about Pakistan and women rights portraying Pakistan negatively?
Q2. Are tweets about Pakistan and girls' education portraying Pakistan negatively?

Research Design

The research methodology of quantitative content analysis was applied to collect data and analyze it. Content analysis is an efficient methodology to analyze the content of media, and widely used in mass media researches.

Sampling. Out of all the social networking sites, Twitter was selected for this study. As it is a popular network having about one billion accounts worldwide, including 1.9 million users in Pakistan (Dawn, 2011). On an average, 6000 tweets are made from

around the world in one second (Internet live stats, 2014). Further, any tweet that is once made on Twitter, gets recoded in the library of congress and can be retrieved through Library's archives in their original forms even when deleted (Allen, 2013).

Time Period: A sum of 449tweets were recorded from a stratified sample of three months of 2014 that is June, July and August; in the following order:

Month June July August
Days 1-10 11-20 21-30

First ten days were drawn from June, mid ten days were drawn from July and the last ten days were drawn from August. The search queries which were entered on Twitter's advanced search engine were #women rights, Pakistan and #girls education, Pakistan. The resultant tweets were recorded in three categories which were positive, negative and neutral. While each of these categories was divided into sub categories which are shown in table 1 and table 2.

Rationale for selecting time period. Many bills had been passed for women protection and awarding them basic and equal rights to men since 2014. The number of NGO working for them also increased. Further, the media being more free and grass rooted year by year, helped bringing the problems to the notice of authorities and managed to get the solved. Similarly, Malala Yousafzai, was nominated as one of the 100 influential people of the world, received a number of awards on her struggle for education of children especially girls, and her address at United Nations in 2013 all brought a positive thinking about Pakistani people that they are working very hard for getting the girls educated despite the threat posed by the terrorists. So, three months were chosen from 2014, that was after Malala's speech and winning of awards so that it could be seen that how Pakistan is being portrayed post Malala attacks and initiatives taken at government level to give rights to the women.

Findings and Discussion

The first research question aimed to find out if there was greater number of negative tweets about Pakistan and women rights as compared to the positive tweets.

Table1

Total tweets. Unique tweets, re-tweets and favorites for #women rights, Pakistan.

	Positive	Negative				Other			
	12	150				17			
	Equal Rights Granted	Initiatives taken by government	Harassment, sex trafficking and rape	Hard struggle for rights	Demand for equal rights	Demand for basic rights	Honor killing	Irrel-evant	Neutral
Total Tweets	3	9	24	19	26	36	45	17	0
Unique Tweets	3	2	4	9	12	7	14	3	0
Re-tweets	0	7	20	10	14	29	31	14	0
Favorites	2	10	13	12	12	22	15	7	0

Findings indicate that there were 179 tweets for women rights. Out of them only 12 (6.70%) tweets were in the positive category while 150 (83.79%) tweets were in the negative category and 17 (9.5%) were in the other category. The favorites and re-tweet numbers have a direct relation with the portrayal of Pakistan and the findings indicate that Pakistan was more negatively portrayed in comparison to the positiveness. As the favorites for the positive category were 12 (12.90%) whereas for the negative category they were 74 (79.57%). Similarly, the re-tweet to unique tweet ratio, which shows that how many times a single tweet was re-tweeted, is also high for the negative category as shown in table 3.

Women in Pakistan do live in a miserable condition and thats another area where Pakistan is defamed for. Pakistan stands on number three for being dangerous for women to live in (The new economy, 2014). One of the most endemic social problem in Pakistan is the domestic violence on women, the other is killing them for the sake of honor. Statistics show that thousands of girls and women are killed and injured every year. In most of the under developed areas, women are deprived of even basic necessities of life. But the government is taking steps to improve the condition of women in the country. The violent crimes against women were announced to be tried under Anti-Terrorism Act (Amnesty International, 2010).

In order to control honor killing the culprit was to be prisoned for at least seven years or even death penalty could be imposed in extreme cases. Many bill were passed like Prevention of anti-

Women Practices Bill, Protection of Women Rights Bill Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010', Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012, and 'Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011. These bills are attempts to put an end to practices like karokari, vani, forced marriages, marriage with Quran, swara. They also grant women the right of inheritance in property which Islam has already given to them but the society, due to its negligence and illiteracy denies. They provide her protection at the workplace and outside (Sheikh, 2011). Food, security and boarding places are provided at DaarulAmaan to the insecure women in almost all cities of Pakistan and are run by the state.

Many other programs that provide them economical support have also been started. Women Entrepreneurship Initiative is aimed at improving the state of women by providing them with facilities that help them in running their businesses. Similarly, many private organizations are also working for the same cause.

The women are also given quotas in government assemblies and all other institutions. In national assembly, 17 percent seats are reserved for women. Several women are serving as ministers and a huge number is in the fields of education and health. Despite all these initiatives and struggles, Pakistan was portrayed negatively in terms of women rights in Pakistan and only 6.70% tweets were made in its favor. The tweets in the negative category were 83.80%. There is a lot to highlight about the condition of women and paint a better picture of Pakistan.

The second research question dealt with girls education and Pakistan. The findings are shown in the table below:

	Positive	Negative						Other		
	66	189						15		
	Initiatives taken by government	Applauding the struggles of girls	Support shown by citizens	Government initiatives demanded	Mentioning out of school girls	Mentioning lack of facilities	Mentioning threats on going to school	Irrelevant	Neutral
Total Tweets	10	46	10	14	111	6	58	1	14
Unique Tweets	2	25	2	2	15	2	9	1	8
Re-tweets	8	21	8	12	96	4	49	0	6

Favorites	0	24	6	7	43	3	13	0	2 0

Table 2

Total tweets. Unique tweets, re-tweets and favorites for #girls education, Pakistan.

There were 270 tweets for girls' education. Out of them 66 (24.44%) tweets were in the positive category, 189(70%) tweets were in the negative category and 15 (5.56%) were in the other category. Similarly, the favorites for the positive category were 30 (25.86%), for the negative category they were 66 (56.89%) and for the other category they wee 20 (17.24%). Though in terms of girls' education Pakistan was less negatively portrayed as compared to women rights. The re-tweet to tweet ratio for girls education in Pakistan is shown in table 3.

The positive tweets on girls' education owed to Malala YousufZai, as the research was held past that incident. Malala gained Pakistan a very positive image but the citizens, during this period, were unable to cash positive opinion for Pakistan as only 24.44% tweets were made in comparison to 70% tweets in the negative category. Although her struggles managed to gain Pakistan a comparatively positive image but on the same time it showed the darker side of Pakistani society. Her struggles got much highlighted in the main stream media as well. But still there were very less tweets in favor of Pakistan in terms of Girls education.

Table 3

The re-tweet to tweet ratio

	Positive	Negative	Other
Women Rights	1.4	2.26	4.67
Girls' education	1.28	5.75	0.67

The re-tweet to tweet ratio for the positive tweets of women rights was 1.4 while for the negative tweets, it was 2.26 which means that negative tweets about women rights in Pakistan were more propagated as compared to the positive tweets about Pakistan. The re-tweet to tweet ratio for the positive tweets of girls' education was 1.28, for the negative tweets it was 5.75 and for the other category it was 0.67. It indicates that each negative tweet about Pakistan, on an average, was propagated about four times more than the positive tweet.

Conclusion

Perception is reality. This fact has highlighted the importance of propagation of positive information about a particular product, service or idea. Thus branding of a product not only increases its sale but also earns trustworthy relation between the manufacturer and the consumer. Similarly, nation branding is as important as branding of any product. The foreign ministry of a country is given the responsibility to build and maintain a positive image. But, the social media that has given freedom to every citizen to utter whatever he feels and convey his point of view to the whole world, has also enabled him to work for his country. He, sitting at home, can play a significant role in determining how th world identifies his country. This power of social media and citizens is employed by many states. Hasbara initiative is an example of this by the Israeli Ministry, as already discussed.

The users can use it to promote positive sides and defy the negative stereotypes about it. Any tweet, or post once made on the social media triggers other users to propagate it. This makes the positive posts about one's country even more important. Pakistan in terms of women rights and girls education needed to be promoted positively as many initiatives by government and private institutions had been taken for the women of the country and Malala also was earning Pakistan a positive image by highlighting the struggle of Pakistani people to get educated despite the threats from terrorists. But the findings of this study show that Pakistanis were not active in propagating a positive message about women rights and girls education in Pakistan. Pakistan was being portrayed negatively in both these fields on social media. Though some citizens were trying to portray a positive image but their efforts needed to be enhanced in quantity and quality to gain fruitful results. Also, if they were trained and government support was provided as it was seen in Hasbara initiative by the Israeli government, it could gain more positive outcomes.

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