

Role of Social Media in Promoting Sustainable Development

¹ Prof. B. Balaswamy

² Ramesh Palvai, Research Scholar

^{1,2} Dept. of Journalism and Communication
Osmania University
Hyderabad
Telangana State ,India

Abstract

Today sustainable development is the common goal of world countries. Sustainable development is an integrated and holistic approach that calls for the participation of individuals, groups, organizations, public and governments at individual, local, regional, national and global levels. The goal of sustainable development is not confined to one locality or region or nation but it is for the entire globe. This is also not for a few years, but in to the distant or for the entire future. Thus spatially and temporally its scope is very wide. It requires people to think globally and act locally. Informed and conscious citizens can utilize poverty alleviation programmes effectively, leading to their success These citizens can also play a responsible role in promoting environmental protection in various walks of their lives. The advances in information and communication technologies have introduced mediated-communication which in turn enabled the relationship development process and spread the concern for sustainable development. The social media has enabled an individual to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people ideas, opinions, products, services, and culture across the world. Social media enabled users to learn about new ideas and social movements as their friends and colleagues become involved in them. Social media empower viral marketing of ideas, events, and organizations by enabling the rapid sharing of information received from one contact to all others. Since the early 90s, the conventional media played a remarkable role in creating awareness about the concept of sustainable development. However, this trend has changed with the emergence of social media which spread sustainable development concepts through peer learning. This paper is intended to explore the extent of social media's contribution to sustainable development and how it is uniting like-minded people and driving them to take collective action.

Keywords: Sustainable development, social media, environment, common concerns, traditional media, Climate of opinion and participation.

Introduction

Development has been a highly debated and probably the most commonly shared concern of the world countries since the end of World War II. Last six decades have witnessed a remarkable shift in the meaning and focus of development. It was generally assumed that a nation became truly modern and developed when it arrived at that point where it closely resembled western industrial nations in terms of political and economic behaviour and institutions, attitudes towards technology, innovation and social and psychic mobility (Fjes, 1976). From 1940s to late 1960s economists, sociologists, psychologists and communication experts believed that industrialization, urbanization and modernization were the routes to development. Thus the meaning of 'development' in 1950 and 60s was transition of traditional societies as complex modern societies or in other words, transformation of third world countries into the form of industrialized, 'developed' countries, such as, USA, UK. etc (Balaswamy, 2006).

The Paradigm Shift: Sustainable Development

As mentioned earlier, industrialization, urbanization and modernization were considered to be the main routes for development, but they could not eradicate the poverty, inequality and other ills of the society. Besides, owing to the process of industrialization based on vast investments of capital, high level application of science and technology, excessive convenient and opulent life style of affluent people and population explosion some deleterious effects took place on environment and society, such as, social and economic inequalities, health hazards, soil erosion, desertification, acid rains and pollution of atmosphere. Today the human race faces enormous challenges to its very existence due to the over exploitation of natural resources, carbon emissions of fossil fuels and the consequent warming of the earth climate and damage to the ozone layer.

The concept of sustainable development is an attempt to combine growing concerns about a range of environmental issues with socio-economic issues. The concept of sustainable development has occupied a central place in every aspect of human life today. It is a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary concept covering almost all spheres of human activity. Sustainable development has become the concern of economists, ecologists, administrators, communication experts, environmentalists, human rights activists, lawyers, feminists, scientists and NGOs. In other words, it has become everybody's cup of tea (Balaswamy, 2006). World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Sustainable Development: Need for Evolving a New Life Style

As a trend is spreading in the west, in other parts of the world also there is a need to adopt a new life style i.e., productive, equitable and environment friendly. In the west hundreds of thousands of people belong to organizations, such as, the National Wild Life Federation, Sierra Club, Audubon Society and Wilderness Society. The environmental movements exist as one of the most important social movements of the 20th century. Environmental movements are not confined to west. In developing countries also such movements are gaining significance. In India Mrs. Medha Phatkar, Mr. Sundarlal Bahuguna are known for spearheading such environmental movements as Narmada Bachavo Andolon, Chipko movement respectively. In west, in addition to joining national organizations, individual and family life styles have changed including behaviours such as recycling aluminum cans, increasing visits to national parks and purchasing environmentally friendly products. Manufacturers have responded by featuring green themes in advertising campaigns (Neuzil, et.al. 1996). More bio-degradable, compostable and recyclable materials are incorporated in packaging to meet consumer demand. Neighbourhood cleanup programmes enjoy wide participation in all sizes of communities.

Every individual influences and is influenced by the environment. An individual can contribute for the degradation or upgradation of environment depending upon how one moulds one's life style. For instance, by throwing the garbage in streets, cutting trees, by over consuming or wasting water, power, fuel, and one can contribute for the environmental degradation. On the other hand by keeping surroundings neatly by planting trees, by recycling wastes, by adopting family planning, and by consciously using and minimizing the use of water, power and fuel, one can contribute to the upgradation of environment. If every individual raises a tree at his or her house automatically that village or colony can become like a beautiful garden. Thus individuals and their life styles have a responsible role to play in making sustainable development a reality.

Importance of Communication in Development

Development programmes can only realise their full potential if knowledge and technology are shared effectively, and if populations are motivated and committed to achieve success. Unless people themselves are the driving force of their own development, no amount of investment or provision of technology and inputs will bring about any lasting improvements in their living standards. Communication is central to this task in many ways. For example, it enables planners, when identifying and formulating development programmes, to consult with people in order to take into account their needs, attitudes and traditional knowledge. Only with communication will the project beneficiaries become the principal actors to make development programmes successful. Helping people at all levels to communicate empowers them to recognise important issues and find common grounds for action, and builds a sense of identity and participation in order to implement their decisions (<http://www.fao.org>).

Social Media

Social media is a platform for people to discuss their issues and opinions. Social media are computer tools that allow people to share or exchange information's, ideas, images, videos and even more with each other through a particular network. Now a day's social media has been the important part of one's life from shopping to electronic mails, education and business tool. Social media plays a vital role in transforming people's life styles. Social media includes social networking sites and blogs where people can easily connect with each other (Shabnoor Siddiqui and Tajinder Singh, 2016). Social media has revolutionized the way we view ourselves, the way we see others and the way we interact with the world around us. Social media has many positive implications, including promoting awareness of specific causes, advertising businesses and helping foster friendships between individuals who may have never met without social networking (Shellabarger, 2016).

Environmental Protection and Social Media

Shannon Dosemagen (2017) observed "Our environment is a shared resource, one that has increasingly been threatened by the rapid expansion of extractive activities to keep up with demands driven by consumerism and shaped by industry. Generally speaking, technology has given us the ability to change some of our behaviours and conduct "greener" business, but we're still not keeping up with the pace of the environmental changes happening because of our overuse of resources. Social media has become an important tool for providing a space and means for the public to participate in influencing or disallowing environmental decisions historically made by governments and corporations that affect us all. It has created a way for people to connect local environmental challenges and solutions to larger-scale narratives that will affect us as a global community". The Pew Internet Project reports 67% of adults who go online use social networking sites. Social media use ranges from 83% of 18-29 year olds to 35% of those age 65 years and older . Environmental organizations are one of the most active groups using social media. Craig Newman, founder of Craigslist.org, conducted a review in 2011 and found that environmental groups are second only to animal advocates in the average number of Facebook posts and tweets per week (Nancy, 2013). Among environmental groups, social media use is fast gaining ground not only as a tool, but also as an image builder. The concept of electronic communication may create the image of "being green" or sustainability in their communication methods, and therefore, may contribute to efforts at promoting environmental conservation and protection. Whether this is perceived on the audience level is still being measured. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter may prove equally beneficial for environmental groups to access user mind space.

Social media and population control

Population has become one of the most important issues in socio-economic development worldwide. Population growth directly triggers higher demand for provision of various aspects of human existence including food, healthcare, housing, jobs, infrastructure, access to resources and many other issues. The higher the rate of population growth, the greater must be cut into present standards of living in order to prevent a fall in future standards of living. The year 2007 marked a new milestone for human population growth: for the first time, more people worldwide were living in cities than in rural areas (UN-HABITAT, 2006). This trend is driven by several factors: people migrating from rural regions to cities; rural areas being reclassified as urban areas because of population growth; and urban populations growing and expanding their boundaries to incorporate land that was formerly classified as rural.

In many developing countries people's awareness of family size is considerably lower. Traditional perceptions about children's value as important capital for a family are still prevalent. As a result, high population growth has been the case in many developing nations. Without population control, an explosion will take place and as a consequence, access to the basic needs of human existence will be much more difficult to obtain. Economic growth will be affected if population growth goes unchecked. Rapid and innovative advances in participative Internet communications, referred to as "social media," offer opportunities for modifying health behavior. Social media let users choose to be either anonymous or identified. People of all demographics are adopting these technologies whether on their computers or through mobile devices, and they are increasingly using these social media for health-related issues. Although social media have considerable potential as tools for health promotion and education, these media, like traditional health promotion media, require careful application and may not always achieve their desired outcomes. The Internet is increasingly used as a medium for the delivery of interventions designed to promote health behavior change.

Social media has the potential to create a 'climate of opinion'- a process by which it can exert an influence primarily through their effect on public opinion rather than on individual opinions and attitudes. Information and counseling services through interactive forums on websites, free direct call and interactive social networking will likely be more important in the future. In rural areas, full use of local and traditional institutions such as youth, religious and cultural, rotational and savings associations, neighborhood and working groups would all be helpful. Partnerships and alliances among stakeholders at all levels need promoting. SOEs and private corporations could be promising partners. They could allocate part of their profits to support family planning under corporate social responsibility programs. Universities might also play an important role by sending their students to rural areas to promote population development programs under public service courses.

Social media and poverty alleviation

Poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems stated the influential Brundtland Commission (1987). Poverty is multi-dimensional as its causes are diverse, its manifestations and definitions are contextual and it is not only a state of deprivation but also a set of processes (Carney, 1999). Poor people know that they are poor because they are unable to control access to information on basic services such as health, education, water and extension advice (Sachs, 2005; Rajput, 2009). They cannot satisfy basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. It is even clear that poor people think that it is desirable and possible to move from their hopeless situation. Inadequate access to information related to credit for investment has been identified as a hindrance to healthy life (Devarajan & Reinikka, 2005).

The media is a prominent vehicle of public information, making it an effective resource to help shape opinion and policy. Social media can help poverty reduction by harnessing the power of information sharing to raise public awareness and involvement. Information sharing through social media can be used to eradicate poverty in all developing countries. Sachs (2005) points out that for the first time in history; our generation has the power and opportunity to end extreme poverty in the world's most desperate regions. To meet this challenge, sharing relevant information that comes with technical and vocational education and training and ICTs are important for empowering poor people. Social media can facilitate interaction among long distantly placed people allowing them to express their views, experiences and to some extent, learners can communicate with their trainers without necessarily having to move from their local residences. This can work more effectively among the poor who are restricted to move away from their families due to financial constraints. Social media has the ability to end corrupt practices and demands accountability which in turn ensure development.

Conclusion

The social media has enabled an individual to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people ideas, opinions, products, services, and culture across the world. While the sustainable development is an integrated and holistic approach that calls for the participation of individuals, groups, organizations, public and governments at individual, local, regional, national and global levels, social media can be helpful to achieve the goals set by sustainable development. Development programmes can only realise their full potential if knowledge and technology are shared effectively, and if populations are motivated and committed to achieve success. In order to achieve this, we need social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter may prove equally beneficial for environmental groups to access user mind space. Information and counseling services through interactive forums on websites, free direct call and interactive social networking will likely be more important in the future. In rural areas, full use of local and traditional institutions such as youth, religious and cultural, rotational and savings associations, neighborhood and working groups would all be helpful.

References

- Balaswamy.B (2006), *Communication for Sustainable Development*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company.
- Brundtland, G.H., 1987. *Our Common Future*, World Commission on Environment and Development. The first edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Retrieved from <http://alcor.concordia.ca/~raojw/crd/reference/reference001377.html> on October 19, 2017.
- Carney, D., 1999. Holistic approaches to poverty reduction: where does agricultural research fit in? in *Assessing the impact of agricultural research on poverty alleviation: Some issues and priorities*. Food Policy 25 (2000) 379–388.
- Devarajan, S. and Reinikka, R.(2005). Making services work for poor people, *Journal of African Economies*, 134, (1), 42-46.
- Fjes, Fred (1976), 'Communication and Development' An unpublished paper, College of Communications, University of Illinois, Urbana-Campaign, cited by Melkote, S.R., (1991)*Communication for Development in Third World Countries*, New Delhi, Sage.
- Nancy (2013), The Environment and Social Media, retrieved from <https://ourhealthandenvironment.wordpress.com/2013/04/02/the-environment-and-social-media/> on October 12,2017.
- Rajput, J. S. (2009). The changing context of TVET for the workforce in India. *International Handbook of Education for the changing world*. Edited by Maclean, R. and Wilson, D. Australia: Adelaide, XIV. 4, pp 2417-2430.
- Sachs, J. (2005), *The end of poverty: economic possibilities of our time*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Shellabarger Ruth Anne (2016), Social Media's Impact on Society, retrieved from <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/social-medias-impact-society> ,on October 13,3017
- Shabnoor Siddiqui and Tajinder Singh (2016), Social Media its Impact with Positive and Negative Aspects, *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research* Volume 5– Issue 2, 71 - 75, 2016, ISSN:- 2319–8656 www.ijcat.com
- Shannon Dosemagen (2017), Social Media and Saving the Environment: Clicktivism or Real Change?,retrieved from <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/shannon-dosemagen-/social-media-and-saving-t b 9100362.html> on October 12,2017.
- <http://www.fao.org/docrep/t1815e/t1815e01.htm>, Communication a key to human development, retrieved on 20-10-17
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme: 2005 annual report*. (2006). Nairobi: UN-HABITAT.

About Authors

Prof.B.Balaswamy is presently Chairperson, Board of Studies in Communication and Journalism, Osmania University. He also served as Head, Department of Communication and Journalism, Osmania University, Hyderabad. Before joining Osmania University, he served as Reader and Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Assam University, Silchar. He did his M.A and Ph.D in Communication from the Central University of Hyderabad. He is author of the book, *Communication for Sustainable Development*. He

contributed chapters to edited volumes of books. He also edited 7 books (study material). He teaches various subjects including Electronic Media and Film Studies.

Ramesh Palvai has enormous print media experience for a span of six years. He worked as Staff Reporter for The New Indian Express, Deccan Chronicle and as Sub-Editor for The Hans India and Postnoon, English dailies. He is currently working as Assistant Professor (C) to teach the PG students of Communication and Journalism at PG College, Osmania University, Siddipet. He is conducting research on the ‘Diversity in Media’ under the supervision of Prof. K. Stevenson, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

