

# Revoking The Spirit Of Nationalism And Empathy Through Social Media: A Case Study Of Siachen Tragedy

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**Abstract :** Social Media presents its users with immediate access and opportunity to express their opinions and emotions. Social Media connects people world over creating a networked community. In the wake of the recent Siachen avalanche tragedy on February 3, 2016 where in ten Indian Army soldiers were buried alive and one Lance Naik Hanumanthappa was found alive after six days, there was significant out pour of activity on the social media. Social Media witnessed out cry of Indians all over the world and others posting, commenting and tweeting about the incident online. Mainly their prayers and pride in Indian Army. Empathy is basic element of humanity. Not only this tragedy raised empathetic reactions but also elevated the spirit of nationalism within no time. This creates a need to know whether empathy is as wide spread in textual communication as face to face communication and how netizens reacted to this tragedy. This study shows that how one catastrophic event brought out a sense of oneness among the netizens. This research follows the content analysis methodology where in 150 tweets from the day of disaster have been coded and analysed in terms of Empathy, Anger and Others. The study shows that empathy was present in almost all of the posts and tweets along with sense of nationalism and also anger over not providing improved technology to house the soldiers. This study has been done in the back drop of Social presence theory and Medium theory with which empathy can be understood better.

**IndexTerms - Netizens (Networked Community), Empathy, Social media, Nationalism, Social presence, Medium Theory**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Empathy is the ability to identify with and understand another person's situation and feelings. Our ability to empathize affects how well we communicate our thoughts and feelings with others, how well we understand others and how comfortable people feel communicating with us. It is at the root of meaningful and deep communication (Leavenson and Reuf, 1992). Empathy appears to be a key ingredient in human communication, regardless of the medium used (Preece and Ghazati, 2001). In the case of social media, though the users may not have known the affected personally, the extent of engaging in verbal or non-verbal communication to convey their sympathy, care, anger or other emotions is high.

Empathy is primarily conveyed by touch, gesture, gaze, voice and posture (Eisenberg et. al. 1989). When these are not available on the communication mediums, we tend to depend upon non-verbal cues such as graphics, emoticons, special characters, etc to express emotions behind the words. People are remarkably creative when motivated to overcome the limitations of textual communication environments (Preece and Ghazati, 2001). This is the case on social media, the users avert to use of computer graphics, emoticons, and even simple things such as capitalization, Italics, punctuation, to emphasize their emotions through text.

The subject of the communication significantly influenced the empathy in online communication. Disasters such as the Siachen Tragedy are not common events which results in a host of non-routine behaviours. The avalanche in Siachen on 3rd February 2016 which resulted in the deaths of Indian army personnel and the miraculous survival of one soldier in particular, Lance Naik Hnumantappa followed by his death created frenzy among Indians resulting in discussions and comments on the situation. This was discussed in all the major news mediums. In the case of social media, anyone having a social media account expressed their opinion. Twitter saw varied array of opinions and expression on the Siachen tragedy. The unusual nature of the incident attracts unprecedented attention and results in widespread discussion, arguments, expression of opinions on Twitter. Observations of emotional communication online have become more numerous with the increase in all kinds of online communities and strong interest by the media, e-commerce entrepreneurs and the public at large (Preece, 2000). Some of this understanding may be informed by Social presence, media richness and related theories (Daft and Lengel, 1986). There is a need to know the extent of empathy expressed

online towards such situations and also a need to try and categorize the different flavours of emotions implied through these tweets. This study makes an attempt at understanding the emotions expressed through social media content and how a disaster unites the people online overcoming the barriers by arising a common emotion of belonging to one nation.

### Review of Literature:

Seo Young Lee and Sang Hee Kweon (2013) base their study on the theory of the planned behaviour. The study explores Social Networking Sites through empathetic intentions and motives affect and foster political participation. This research establishes a high correlation between online and offline political attitudes.

Leysia Palen and Sarah Vieweg (2008) examine the online interaction during an emergency event of national importance. Through this study Palen and Vieweg were able to relate commiseration and information seeking. They state that geographical communities that share a common experience ally in such a public online setting.

Jennifer J. Preece and Kambiz Ghazati (2001) investigated whether empathy online is as evident and effective as in face to face communication. They even questioned whether empathy is widespread on online textual communication. According to their study of a Knee injury support community, overall feeling of the messages were of mutual understanding and that the women were the source of more empathetic messages.

### Statement of the problem:

Revoking the spirit of nationalism and empathy through social media: A case study of Siachen tragedy

### Objectives of the Study:

1. To know whether Empathy is widespread on Social Networking Sites.
2. To know the most favoured type of communication online.
3. To know the level of participation of the social media members.
4. To know the pattern of response to the Siachen tragedy
5. To know the most preferred mode of textual communication.

### Theoretical framework:

**Media Richness Theory:** According to Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel media richness is a function of the medium's capacity for immediate feedback, number of cues and channels available, language varieties and degree to which intent is focused on the recipient. Greater social presence of a medium creates a greater immediacy and warmth of the communication. This is true for the Social Networking Sites such as Twitter and Facebook which offer greater immediacy and convergence of platforms.

**Medium Theory:** Medium theory examines whether the communication is uni-directional or bi-directional and how quickly the messages can be disseminated. According to the medium theorists, these variables influence the medium's use and its social, political and psychological impact. When the present study is viewed in the milieu of Medium theory, we can see that element of immediacy of the social networking sites and how user friendly they are and the tweets and posts related to Siachen tragedy has resulted in strong emotional response and psychological impact.

### Research Methodology:

The present study has solely focused on the content analysis of the social networking site Twitter. First ten tweets of each day from the date of the incident, i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> February to 18<sup>th</sup> February have been collected and analysed according to the codes generated.

### Coding:

The facilitate analysis; the tweets have been categorized into the following codes:

- i. Nature of the message – Textual, Audio - Visual
- ii. Level of participation – Active and Passive participation
- iii. Type of communication – Empathetic, Sense of Nationalism, Anger and The rest (Nature of the words/language used)
- iv. Mode of Textual communication – Textual, Emoticons, Capitalization and Special characters.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Tweet formats

| Format of Tweets     | No of Tweets | Percentage |
|----------------------|--------------|------------|
| Non-Verbal – Textual | 81           | 54%        |
| Audio – Visual       | 32           | 21.33%     |
| Pictures             | 37           | 24.66%     |
| Total                | 150          | 100%       |

Table 1 gives the formats of the tweets analysed. More than half of the tweets, (54%) were of non-verbal in nature. Tweets containing pictures and text amount to 24.66 percent. This shows that maximum percentage of tweets is of non-verbal in nature. This can be substantiated by words of Goleman (1995) who opines that maximum of the emotional messages are non-verbal. The remaining 21.33 percent of the tweet were of audio-visual in nature.

Table 2: Level of Participation

| Participation | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Active        | 93        | 62%        |
| Passive       | 57        | 38%        |
| Total         | 150       | 100%       |

Table 2 depicts the level of participation by the Twitter users, i.e. how many of them are tweeted original message on their own and how many are retweets and shared tweets. More than half (62%) of the tweets are active participants, meaning they have tweet their own unique message on twitter. The remaining 38 percent of the tweets are made up of retweets and shared tweets. It comes to light that majority of the users are active participants, which encourages expressing their opinions in their words.

Table 3: Emotions conveyed through Tweets (Communication Type)

| Communication Type     | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Empathetic             | 133       | 88.66%     |
| Nationalism/Patriotism | 72        | 48%        |
| Anger                  | 52        | 34.66%     |
| The rest               | 21        | 14%        |

It was observed from the table 3 that the categories into which the tweets are divided based on the intent and emotion conveyed through the tweets. A great majority of the tweets, (88.66%) are empathetic in nature. Levenson and Ruef (1992) identifies the three qualities of empathy, Knowing what another person is feeling, Feeling what another person is feeling and Responding compassionately to another person's distress. This was very much evident in majority of the tweets. This shows that empathy is very much present in the online communication and on social media.

48 percent of the tweets contained words like patriot, hero, Proud Indian, Indian, Indian army which are related to the concept of Nationalism. It is important to note that these tweets also contained references to JNU incident. How the same concept of nationalism has both positive and negative repercussions. 34.66 percent of the tweets expressed anger over the situation of the soldiers in Siachen, on politicians and why no party is interested in improving the condition of the soldiers in Siachen. There was mention of Pakistan and border conflict. Only 14 percent of the tweets contained pictures of past Siachen disasters where in Indian soldiers have perished, there was even mention of 11<sup>th</sup> pay commission which recommends the increase of allowance for the soldiers at Siachen glacier, cartoons depicting the situation etc.

Table 4: Mode of Textual Communication

| Mode               | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Textual            | 150       | 100        |
| Capitalization     | 112       | 74.66      |
| Special Characters | 75        | 50         |

It is seen from the contents of the table 4 that the extent of usage of Text, Capitalization and Special characters in the tweets. Cent percent of the tweets did contain words/text. Majority of the tweet (74.66%) of them contained words which were capitalized and 50 percent of the tweets had special characters such as exclamatory marks. These modes of textual communication give an insight into the stress and emphasis on the feelings behind the words.

Along with all these, the most common or repeated ash tags were #Siachen, #Martyrs, #Patriot, #JNU, #JNUrow, #Salute, #Soldiers, #Nationalists, #IndianArmy, #RIP, #Peace.

Many questions like why the government is not using technologies used by the Icelandic nations for their soldiers who have spend most of their days in sub zero temperatures? Why can't India withdraw from the Siachen Glacier? Why not work towards the peace in the borders? Why disasters like this are being used by the politicians for personal benefit?

### Conclusion:

Presently Social media has been thoroughly used to communicate, comment and express opinions online. This study shows how a social media platform Twitter became instrumental in bringing forth the issue of Indian army at Siachen to the forefront. Twitter was successful in bringing about a sense of nationalism and empathy in the minds of all those who are exposed to twitter. According to the present study a great majority of the tweets are empathetic in nature. It is clear that for a communication to be empathetic there is no need to know the affected personally. Social media enables the users to over-come the barrier of distance and identity. The users were successful in raising many important questions. Batson (1987) defines empathy as 'one's perception of others welfare state and consistent others-oriented emotional reactions.' Empathy is also a basic quality of being human. Non-verbal communication and empathy can go hand in hand and the study shows how well human beings make use of words and computer assisted communication to express their feelings and how well empathy can be seen in online communication.

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