

Impetus and Deterrent Factors: Usage of Social Media for Civic Engagement

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Abstract

This is a cross-sectional study analysing the factors affecting the adoption and frequency of online civic engagement by administrators in charge of NGOs. These factors are demographics (Age and Educational qualification), baseline profile (Operational area: rural, urban and rural) and psychographics (Social Trust and Empathy). Frequency of online civic engagement is divided into three categories such as weekends, weekdays and during projects. It was assumed that respondents have high frequency of online civic engagement during weekends rather than weekdays. During pilot study few respondents mentioned that they use social media for civic engagement when the projects begin. So, a third category was formed to know the frequency of usage during projects. For the purpose of research, 60 NGOs from Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali cities were selected and surveyed. Results proved that 'young adult' (below and equal to the age of 40) respondents adopt the social media most for civic engagement than 'adult' (between 41- 60) and 'old' (61+) respondents. On the contrary, analysis proved that age is not associated with the frequency of online civic engagement on weekends, weekdays and during projects. When educational qualification is concerned, data revealed that graduate respondents adopt the social media most for civic engagement than respondents having primary or secondary education. In contrast to these results, it was found that education level has no association with frequency of social media usage for civic engagement. It was hypothesised that NGOs carrying out their major projects in 'urban area' adopt the social media more for civic engagement than NGOs having 'urban' and 'rural' as their operational area. Results show that

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there is no association between operational area and adoption of social media for civic engagement as well as frequency of online civic engagement. Regarding psychographics, it was found that 'trust' and 'empathy' have no association with the adoption of social media for civic engagement.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Social Media, Non Government Organizations, Demographics and Psychographics

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INTRODUCTION

The current study seeks to examine the use of social media tools for civic engagement by NGOs respondents in the cities of Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali. Ehrlich (2000) defines, "Civic engagement as working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes". Though civic engagement can be understood from both nonpolitical and political perspective the current study is taking up the nonpolitical perspective of civic engagement synonymous with 'altruism' and 'volunteerism'.

The reason behind choosing NGOs is that most of these organisations have a social agenda and therefore play a vital role in the development of the country. Even the Planning Commission of India in the 12th five year plan (2012 - 2017) has decided to collaborate with NGOs in almost every project related to 'economic sector, social sector and sustainable growth' such as seed production projects, programmes of provision of rental/ social housing stock for the migrant population, linking science and technology with society, launching clean India campaign, youth development activities such as vocational training, entrepreneurship development, counseling and career guidance, animal welfare, agriculture, education, collecting recyclable

material, health services, etc. In the guidelines given to NGOs, commission has asked to set up a cyber user community so that public can interact with these organisations easily and avail the benefits of schemes. So, 'online interaction' or 'engagement' can be possible after the emergence of web 2.0 only because its interactivity features allow users to generate the content. The term 'web 2.0' is formulated with the concept of 'user generated content' because user can generate and alter the content and they can be 'participants'. Social media comes under web 2.0 because it allows users to 'engage' in civic issues. Discussing the importance of NGOs, Vedder (2003) said that NGOs play an important role in development because these organisations fill the spaces left by the Government due to negligence or lack of financial resources. NGOs often speak up in public debates, through lobbying, and organizing campaigns for creating public awareness, raising funds and organizing protests and boycotts. These organisations work in different areas such as planning and implementation of action programs for the protection of environment, help with food and medicine, education, to develop public policies independently and also coordinate with Government. Discussing the importance of ICT, it has been well said that NGOs can use ICT to reveal their mission and work they have done. Even accountability and legitimacy of activities are achieved when NGOs show record of their past activities and future responsibilities and Internet based NGOs can do it very well by using archive section for past performances and having a database with plans for the future. New technology is very useful for NGOs because it allows them to reach volunteers. So, the current study concentrates on the baseline profile of NGOs, demographic and psychographic variables of the heads of the NGOs affecting the adoption of social media for civic engagement and frequency of online civic engagement.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine whether operational area of the NGOs and demographics and psychographics of the NGO's heads prove to be deterrent or impetus

in adopting of social media for civic engagement.

2. To analyse whether age and educational level of the NGO's heads is associated with frequency of online civic engagement.

METHODOLOGY

The present study seeks to examine the use of social media for civic engagement by NGOs. Sample of 60 NGOs headquartered in Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali was selected. The data collection tool is structured questionnaire comprising of both open ended and close ended questions as well as rating scales. The scales are used to measure the psychographic profiling. These are tested and recognized pre-programmed scales designed to measure some intangible issues. For the purpose of this study, 'Empathy' was measured by using 'Toronto Empathy Scale' derived from a research paper written by Spreng, N., Mckinnon, M. R., & Levine, B. (2009). The response categories of empathy ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scores are divided into three categories; low empathy (≤ 27), medium empathy (28- 54) and high empathy (55+). 'Social Trust' will be determined on a scale derived from the research paper written by Yamagishi, T. (1986). The response categories of trust scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scores were divided into three categories such as low level of trust (≤ 8), medium trust level (9-17) and high trust level (18+).

Regarding the adoption of social media for civic engagement, respondents were directly asked whether they use social media for civic engagement or not. They were given 'yes' and 'no' response options. Further 'Frequency of online civic engagement' is determined in terms of minutes. It has three categories; time spent on social media usage for civic engagement on a weekday and weekend. While doing pilot study when respondents were asked to mention the minutes they spend on using social media for civic engagement on a weekend and weekday, some said that they use social

media only when any project is started. So, a separate category was formed to analyse the 'frequency of online civic engagement during projects'. During pilot study it was also noticed that some respondents mentioned the time spent on a weekday but left the column of weekend and vice versa because they use social media for civic engagement not on a weekday but on a weekend. So, during data collection respondents were given freedom to leave the column blank if they do not use social media for civic engagement, it may be weekend, weekday or during projects. For analytical purpose the minutes asked were measured in quartiles; low frequency (<20 minutes), low to medium frequency (20- 60 minutes), medium to high frequency (60-120) and high frequency (>120 minutes). Since the primary data was divided into various categories, Chi square was used to draw suitable inference. The questionnaire was analyzed by using SPSS. This study proposed to test alternate hypothesis.

H1: There is an association between adoption of social media for civic engagement and age and educational level.

H1: Respondents who are working in urban areas have high level of empathy and social trust and adopt the social media most for civic engagement.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

H1: Frequency of online civic engagement is associated with age and education level of the NGO's owners.

Association between adoption of social media for civic engagement and demographics, psychographics and Operational area of the NGO

Education and Adoption of Social Media for Civic engagement

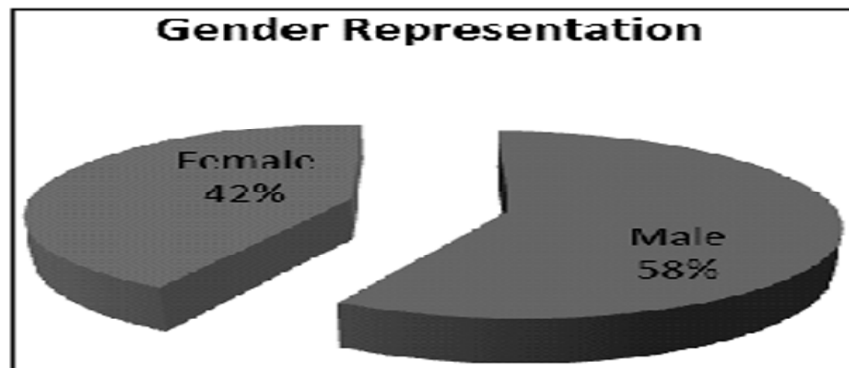
To know the association between adoption of social media for civic engagement and age, education, social trust, empathy and operational area chi square test was used. While reviewing literature it was found that many researchers proved the association between these variables. Graph -1 shows

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the results in cross tabulation between education level and adoption of social media for civic engagement.

Graph 1

Association Between Education Level of the NGO's Owner and Adoption of Social Media for Civic Engagement

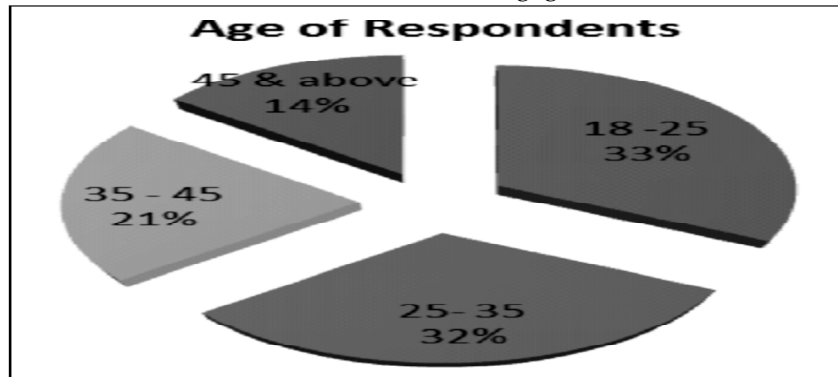


It was hypothesized that those who have attained high education actually adopt social media most for civic engagement than less educated people. The reason is that educated people know how to deal with new technology and use it according to their needs. Chi square was used to check the association between education level and adoption of social media for civic engagement. The p value =.000 is less than .05 which means that alternate hypothesis is accepted and null rejected. So, there is a strong association between two variables. Interpretation of Graph-1 clearly shows that respondents above and equal to the graduation level use the social media most for civic engagement than respondents below the graduation level. Apart from education level, chi square test was also used to check the association between age of the NGO's owner and adoption of social media for civic engagement.

Age and Adoption of Social Media for Civic engagement

Graph 2

Association Between the Age Of NGO's Owner and Adoption of Social Media for Civic Engagement

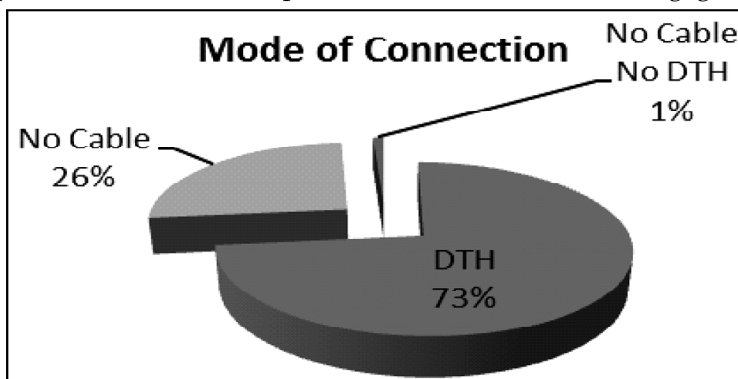


Results reveal that respondents above the age of 60 do not use social media most as compared to the respondents below the age of 60. It is also very clear that respondents below and equal to the age of 40 use social media most for civic engagement than any other age group. Chi square is used to check the association and it has given p value= .004. So, p value is less than .05 which led to the adoption of alternate hypothesis and rejection of null hypothesis. Results prove that there is an association between two variables which means that NGOs having owners below and equal to the age of 40 adopt the social media most for civic engagement.

Operational Area and Adoption of Social Media for Civic engagement

Graph 3

Operational Area and Adoption of Social Media for Civic Engagement



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It was also assumed that NGOs in rural operational area do not use social media for civic engagement. The reason is that people living in rural area do not have access to Internet and thus NGOs cannot use social media in rural area as compared to NGOs working in urban and rural area. Contrary to the assumption, chi square has given p value= .396 which means there is no association between the operational area and adoption of social media for civic engagement. P value is greater than .05 which means that null hypothesis is accepted and alternate rejected. So, there is no association between two variables. Even Graph 3 clearly shows that in the sample 60 NGOs, 18 have rural operational area, 40 urban and 2 rural. More than 81 percent NGOs from every operational area are using social media for civic engagement. According to IAMAI- IMRB report, urban areas of India has a growth rate of 35 percent with 118 million Internet users. On the other hand, rural India has a growth rate of 100 percent having 25 million Internet users as compared to 2014 (2015 Report). This report also said that social media was the main reason that many people started using Internet.

Social Trust and Adoption of Social Media for Civic Engagement

Table 1 Social Trust and Adoption of Social Media for Civic Engagement

<i>Social Trust & Social Media Usage</i>	<i>Do you use social media for civic engagement</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
Medium Trust Level	23	1	24
High Trust Level	29	7	36
Total	52	8	60

Apart from the demographic variables and operational area of the NGO, it was assumed that low level of social trust also hampers the usage of social media for civic engagement. Social media is all about the interactivity options and those who do not trust others prefer not to use this medium to interact with strangers because online identity of a person can be concealed.

Researchers have supported this notion also such as Uslaner (2000) found that low level of trust discourages civic participation especially on Internet where people do not trust each other because anyone can hide his/ her identity. While Smith (1966) in his study found that those who actively participate in voluntary organisations have high level of trust.

So, NGO owners were asked about their level of social trust towards others. It was assumed that people having high level of social trust use the social media most for civic engagement than those who scored low on social trust scale. It is usual that the person who trusts others can only interact freely with others and use the web 2.0 technology for civic engagement. Chi square was used to check the association between adoption of social media for civic engagement and level of trust. Analysis revealed that there is no association between two variables because the p value= .088 greater than .05. It means that alternate hypothesis is rejected and null accepted.

Empathy and Adoption of social media for civic engagement

Table 2: Empathy and Adoption of Social Media for Civic Engagement

<i>Empathy & Social Media Usage</i>	Do you use social media for civic engagement		Total
	Yes	No	
Medium Empathy Level	6	0	6
High Empathy Level	46	8	54
Total	52	8	60

It was hypothesized that high level of empathy leads to adoption of social media for civic engagement because people having more empathic concern toward others can adopt different ways to help others. Many researchers have also conducted research to find the relationship between empathy and volunteerism. Such as Brunell, Tumblin, & Buelow (2014) have conducted the study to know why people spend time and money on others. Researchers selected the sample from a voluntary organisation and college

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students who were volunteers. The association between narcissism and empathy, volunteerism and empathy, volunteerism and narcissism was tested. Researchers described narcissism as benefits to the self when people indulge in an activity for self-benefits and leadership. Narcissistic personalities lack humanitarian concerns and they are totally opposite the empathic people. Results revealed that empathic people use skills and knowledge to help others while the narcissistic participated in voluntary activities to build their interpersonal relationships, make new contacts, obtain benefits for their career and avoid guilt or negative feelings. It was also found that narcissistic people lack empathy but empathic people participated frequently in voluntary activities. The reason is that they suffer pain while seeing the suffering of others.

So, on the basis of previous studies it was assumed that empathic people also use social media most for civic engagement. Chi square was used to find the association between two variables. Analysis shows that p value = .311 greater than .05 which means that null hypothesis is accepted and alternate rejected. It shows no association between adoption of social media for civic engagement and empathy. So, the assumption is falsified by the statistical test. Even the Table 2 shows that there were six respondents in medium empathy category and all of them used social media for civic engagement. Similarly most of the respondents scoring high on empathy scale were using social media for civic engagement.

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN FREQUENCY OF ONLINE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND AGE AND EDUCATION LEVEL

After analyzing the association between adoption of social media for civic engagement and demographic, psychographic variables and baseline profile of an NGO, it becomes important to know whether these variables also increase the frequency of online civic engagement. So, cross tabulation is done by using SPSS to check the association between demographic variables and frequency of online civic engagement. Chi-square was used

but it cannot check the accurate association here because most of the columns have less than 5 frequencies. Frequency of online civic engagement is analyzed in three different categories such as on weekdays, weekends and during projects only. It is assumed that people spend more time in online civic engagement during weekends than weekdays because of more free time. A third category is about ‘usage during projects only’. It is formed because some people do not use social media on regular basis. So, for such people a third category is formed to know how much time they spend using social media for civic engagement when an NGO has started a project.

Table 3: Frequency of Online Civic Engagement on Weekdays and Age and Education Level

Age and Education VS Frequency of online usage		Frequency of Online Civic Engagement on Weekdays				Total
		< 30	31 - 60	61 – 120	121>	
Age	<40	0	1	3	2	6
	41 – 60	5	6	5	7	23
	61 >	2	2	2	2	8
	Total	7	9	10	11	37
Education	Graduation	2	3	3	2	10
	Post graduation >	5	6	7	9	27
	Total	7	9	10	11	37

Analyzing the Table 3 horizontally, it is very clear that respondents above the age of 61 are less in high frequency of civic engagement than other age groups. While not even a single respondent below and equal to the age of 40 comes under low frequency of civic engagement. Chi square has given the p value= .799 which is greater than .05. So, null hypothesis is accepted and alternate rejected. It means that there is no association between two variables. So, age neither hampers nor increases the frequency of online civic engagement. Contrary to the findings of the present study some researchers such as Murray and Harrison (2002) conducted the survey of Canadian citizens to know the status of online volunteering. Discussing the

association between demographics and online volunteering, researchers have found out that though youngsters are online most of the time, they participate very less in online volunteering. Nevertheless, Rayness and Walker (2008) said that most of the youngsters use the Internet for civic issues because new technology is easy to use, facilitates multiple languages and provides interactivity options.

While analysing education level and frequency of online civic engagement during weekdays, chi square proves that there is no association between two variables. The p value= .880 which is greater than .05. So, it led to the acceptance of null hypothesis and rejection of alternate hypothesis. Even Table 3 clearly shows that both graduate and post graduate respondents are equal in every category of frequency of online civic engagement. On the contrary to the findings of the present study, Murray and Harrison (2002) found that education plays an important role in raising the level of volunteering because data show that people having high education level volunteer more frequently. While Shah et al (2002) in their study found that high education level leads to more Internet usage which further encourages civic participation. Supporting these results Bergman (2005) said that education level also affects the status of online volunteering because it was found that people having high education level use Internet frequently for community issues.

Table 4: Frequency of Online Civic Engagement in Weekends and Age and Education Level

		Frequency of Online Civic Engagement on Weekdays				Total
		< 30	31 - 60	61 – 120	121>	
Age	<40	2	0	2	1	5
	41 – 60	9	3	7	2	21
	61>	2	2	2	1	7
	Total	13	5	11	4	33
Education	Graduation	4	1	3	2	10
	Post graduation >	9	4	8	2	23
	Total	13	5	11	4	33

The analysis reveals that there is no association between frequency of online civic engagement on weekends and age. Chi square has given the p value= .881 which led to the acceptance of null hypothesis and rejection of alternate hypothesis. So, it is proved that there is no association between two variables. Interpreting the Table 4, it proves that all the respondents from all age groups are very less in high as well as low frequency of civic engagement. Similarly, chi square is used to analyse the association between education level and frequency of online civic engagement. It has given p value= .793 which led to the acceptance of null hypothesis and rejection of alternate hypothesis. Even Table 4 shows that both graduate and post graduate respondents have similar frequency of online civic engagement. So, education level does not hamper or encourage the frequency of online civic engagement.

Table 5: Frequency of Online Civic Engagement During Projects and Age and Education Level

		Frequency of online civic engagement during projects		Total
		60	120	
Age	< 40	0	4	4
	41 – 60	1	8	9
	61>	0	2	2
	Total	1	14	15
Education	Secondary education +2	0	1	1
	Graduation	1	5	6
	Post graduation >	0	8	8
	Total	1	14	15

To check the association between Age and Frequency of online civic engagement during projects, chi square is not used because more than 80 percent of the columns have less than 5 frequencies. Table 5 clearly shows that out of 60 there were only 15 respondents who used social media for civic engagement during projects only. Interpretation of Table 5 proves age

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and education level do not lower the frequency of online civic engagement because respondents from every age group and of every education level have high frequency of online civic engagement.

FINDINGS

The present study has attempted an interpretative analysis about the impact of demographic, psychographic variables and operational area of an NGO on adoption and frequency of social media for civic engagement. Chi square was used to check the association between these variables and research investigation has revealed that both education level and age of the NGOs is associated with the adoption of social media for civic engagement but it has no association with frequency of online civic engagement during weekends, weekdays and during projects. Results have also proved that operational area, level of social trust and empathy is not associated with the adoption of social media for civic engagement. So, NGOs that are operating in rural, urban or rural area equally adopt social media for civic engagement. It does not matter whether an NGO's owner has low or high level of social trust and empathy as in both cases he/ she is using social media for civic engagement. Research has proved that few demographic as well as psychographic variables do not hinder or promote the usage of social media for civic engagement but even then social media is important for volunteers. O'Lear (1999) also mentioned the importance of social media in his research. He conducted the research to know that for what purposes grassroots activist groups are using e-mail. He found that this group was using email for the construction of the network for engagement and to generate the activism at both national and international level. Researchers have found that new technologies make the users active participants rather than be passive consumers.

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