**The LGBTQ activist on social media: Analyzing LGBTQ activism online in India and Taiwan**

**Paromita Pain**

**Victoria Y Chen**

**Introduction**

On August 24, 2017, India’s Supreme Court ruled that the right to individual privacy is an “intrinsic” and fundamental right, upheld by the country’s constitution. The judges also criticized a previous Supreme Court verdict on Section 377, saying that the verdict was an infringement on “the unhindered fulfillment of one’s sexual orientation, as an element of privacy and dignity (Human rights Watch, 2017). The period leading up to the August 24, 2017, verdict saw an outpouring of tweets and other messages on various social media from LGBTQ groups, activists and people protesting government infringement into their private lives and about the importance of consent. In Taiwan, the study of non-normative gender and sexual identities has always been rich in anthropological, historical, and literary detail (Wang, Griffiths, & Grande, 2018; Tao-Ming, 2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBTQ) rights in Taiwan, have been regarded as some of the most progressive in East Asia and Asia in general. Taiwan legalized gay marriage in 2017, becoming the first Asian country to do so. The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation or gender identity, or social status. Yet, in their work on the lives of sexual minorities post the democracy, scholars like Ho (2010) and Petrus Liu (2015) emphasize that minority rights have become more marginalized and, such populations, more stigmatized than ever. Also, queer Taiwan has often been left outside of mainstream academic dialogues focused on LGBTQ issues.

LGBTQ rights have always been politically controversial in Asia but recent developments like the legal interferences in India and the progressive route to marriage taken by Taiwan have ensured that LGBTQ issues were once again prominent in public debate. India and Taiwan are on very different ends of the spectrum with regard to LGBTQ rights. India has overturned ruling that had legalized same sex relations in 2013. Police harassment and social ostracization of LGBTQ communities is rampant. In Taiwan, while laws may seem progressive, social norms are not always accepting, and mass media’s gaze is decidedly homophobic. These are precisely the reasons why it is important to compare and contrast the use of new media in mobilization and education efforts in these two countries, especially around contentious issues of sexual orientation. This study analyzes how social media can serve as an effective means of disseminating alternative information, education and help mobilize people around LGBTQ causes by analyzing how LGBTQ activists in Taiwan and India use social media and frame issues. to educate and mobilize audiences and how the potential of social media can be further extended for LBGT activism.

Through interviews with activists, we explored nuanced explanations of how social network sites (SNS) has benefited activism by extending networks of information and organizing audiences to articulate their rights and as well as establishing an online counter public sphere. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular social networking sites, globally, as well as in India and Taiwan. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender are categories that represent differing needs and social positions, yet they also have in common the generalized forms of discrimination that occur along ethnic and class lines (Thoreson, 2012). It is no secret that today the internet is vital to the way LGBTQ youth form connection, develop identities and cultures but this is also dependent on the kind of access they have (Jenzen, 2022). As they serve as “social modalities of individualism and community” (Macintosh & Bryson, 2008), in different countries and especially in Asian countries like India and Taiwan, these social interactions often combine activism and discourse from different strata of society and age groups that is also often deeply political in nature. Much of LGBTQ studies and social media cultures are primarily characterized by a predominance of US and Western and hetero-cisgender perspectives. Though this lacuna has been addressed, to an extent, few inquiries throw the spotlight on how LGBTQ populations use new media technology, as a means of education and empowerment in the South Asian context.

**The LBGT scenario in India**

An observer from India, in a study done by Altman in 1996, had said that “….India has no gay movements and perhaps never will. There are no gay magazines; perhaps they don't need them. There are no gay bars per se; again, perhaps, they are not necessary ....” (Altman, 1996, 86). But in 1993, Khush-list the first mailing list for LGBTQ South Asians, predominantly Indians in metropolitan cities and those living abroad already existed. The rise of the internet enabled greater and open communication as well as mobilizing for social action among sexual minorities (Pullen, 2010).

The 1999’s were a time when e-groups online gradually moved to Yahoo groups and flourished. GayBombay.org (1998) and Orinam.net (2006) are two sites predominantly designed to serve Chennai and Bombay areas. Today, the scenario has certainly changed with online publications like Pink Pages and Gaylaxy that have regular issues. India's first queer radio channel, Q Radio, Out and Proud, completely dedicated to LGBTQ audiences with a variety of talk shows and music is on 24 hours a day. But few were as influential as Bombay Dost started in the 1990’s and which helped gay populations understand their identity and connect to others. In 2008, coordinated pride events in the four capital cities of Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and Kolkata demanded the striking down of Section 377, criminalizing homosexual activities. Chapter XVI, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, introduced during the British rule of India dates back to 1860 and criminalizes sexual activities “against the order of nature”, including homosexual sexual activities.

There is little acceptance of LGBTQ populations by mainstream society. As an in-depth report (2005) by the BBC1 reiterated, “Homophobia, say support groups, is acute in India.” Little has changed even though this January (2018), India’s Supreme Court declared it would re-examine Section 377 of the Indian Penal code, which bans “carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal” — an act currently punishable by life imprisonment. The concept of the Right to Privacy was under threat last year (2017) when in August a petition was made challenging the constitutional validity of the Indian biometric identity scheme Aadhaar. The Supreme Court upheld that “The right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty…” As the justice panel on August 24, 2017, noted, while the country’s LGBTQ population might be “minuscule,” they had fundamental rights to privacy and freedom.

In urban India, especially among economically stronger groups, homosexuality is seemingly more accepted, at least on the surface. For example, the first gay parade in the country was held in the city of Kolkata in 1999 (Drucker, 1996). It is those audiences far away from mainstream glare that face discrimination and atrocities that often remain undocumented. Maya Sharma’s (2006) seminal survey of underprivileged lesbians in India shows that using the word lesbian provokes what she calls a ― “discourse of catastrophe” (Sharma, 2006: 38).

Lesbians in India bear the twin mantles of being women and divergent from the heteronormative ideal (Arthi, 2017). In a deeply patriarchal society like India, lesbianism offers certain inherent challenges to the privilege of being male; it is a clear suggestion that lesbians can live rich and fulfilling lives without men. With increases in accessible technology, projects like the Project Bolo, meaning 'Project Speak Up' documenting the oral histories of Indian LGBTQ people, are now being hosted on YouTube. In spite of exclusive lesbian groups visibility of lesbians in the public sphere of the country is minimal. While magazines and media exclusively for gay populations keep these issues alive, they reach a very tiny segment of the LGBTQ minority in the country. Beyond colorful presentations of pride marches, the hard questions associated with homosexuality, especially those of equality, are rarely debated even on the most liberal mainstream media platforms. As voices of right-wing extremists grow in the country, SSN has emerged as a collective space for expressing views and the mobilization of these voices for social change.

**The LBGT scenario in Taiwan**

The first gay bars in Taiwan, along with American style restaurants, bars, and clubs, opened in major cities during the 1960s Vietnam War. There is a strong American orientation in Taiwanese lesbian activism and feminism, especially after the lifting of martial law, and Liang – ya Liou (2015) has argued that in the 1990’s, Taiwan’s queer discourse has used American and European cultural hegemony to pry open the homosexual closet in Taiwan’s public culture (p 274). In the process it has failed to address questions of social exclusion and individual experiences that diverge significantly as members of officially defined minority groups like women, aborigines, and migrant workers (Liu, 2007).

The first Taiwanese annual Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBTQ) Pride Parade started in 2003 and marked the beginning of various pride marches. Most of these marches used the opportunity to bring about parity in gender equality and education, using themes like the 2004 parade— ‘Awaken Citizen Consciousness.’ In 2012, people took to the streets of Taipei to express their support for the rights of LGBTQ people and called upon the government to respect gender pluralism, sexual diversity and to legalize same-sex marriage. In 2013, a parade entitled ‘Make LGBTQ Visible – 2.0—The Voice of Sexual Sufferers’ (similar to the theme of the first parade ‘Let LGBTQ Be Seen’) hoped to mobilize LGBTQ victims of a predominantly oppressive system and to fight for equality.

In general, women and the college-educated hold more liberal attitudes toward LGBTQ populations than men and the lesser educated in recent years (Cheng, Wu, & Adamczyk, 2016). Christians were not especially intolerant toward homosexuality in 1995 but became significantly less tolerant than other religions by 2012 (Cheng, Wu, & Adamczyk, 2016). Cultural values, especially perceived parental attitudes toward marriage and participants' endorsements of filial piety values are important influences shaping the way LGBT individuals perceive their sexual identities (Zhang, Chi, Wu, Wang, & Wang, 2012). LBGT marriages may be legal in Taiwan but Taiwan’s thoughts on gender and family remain conservative. Society, legally, may be accepting but certainly is not as inclusive as it should be. For example, gestational surrogacy is not allowed, and lesbian couples can only adopt children.

**LGBT mobilization on social media**

The internet has tremendous potential to achieve greater social equity and improve everyday life for those on the margins of society (Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004). Social media has provided crucial alternative media tools for activists (Kenix, 2009), offering activists a fast and easy way to create, and spread their message without depending on mainstream media (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). For example, in 2010, Hou Haiyang, a 23-year-old graduate from Northeast Normal University in China, urged heterosexuals to come out in support of over 50 million LGBTQ people on renren.com, a well-known social networking site (SNS) among college students. His campaign, Smile for Gay, collected 4409 smiles and greetings in record time. Boys’ & Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong and Taiwan Adolescent Association on Sexualities took the campaign global by bringing it to Facebook (2010). In 2014, when India declared homosexuality to be against the law of the land, the Global Day of Rage, organized mostly through Facebook, Twitter and mailing lists helped coordinate protests and gatherings so that anyone, anywhere, could join in the protection of this basic human right. In India, urban women Facebook users draw on ‘idle talk’ (Rysman 1977, 176; Ray, 2013), that acts as ‘a catalyst of social process[es]’ (Paine, 1967, p 283; Ray, 2013) and the bonding encouraged by such interaction unite a range of feminist voices by overcoming their geographical and cultural differences (Ray, 2013).

Using the Internet to interact has positive impacts, especially among LGBT populations. For example, a 2014 study shows that many men who have sex with men perceived a greater acceptance of their sexuality, the exploration of new sexual possibilities and more assertive communication styles (Nodin, Carballo-Diéguez, & Leal, 2014) online. A telling example is the LBGT political party Ladlad in the Philippines which over the years developed a wide set of internet-based campaign strategies, including online narratives and discursive spaces in its website, e-group, and social networking sites, mobilizing members with diverse self-concepts, ways of life, and sexualities (Soriano, 2014).

Queer or no, social media with its ability to create and encourage conversation also sustains certain gendered patterns of communication. For example, the stalking and trolling of women online is real and often unceasing (Chawki & el Shazly, 2013; Chen & Pain, 2017). In the western world, Pullen & Cooper (2010) argue that the internet has revealed ‘new social worlds’ which go ‘beyond the virtual’ on the different levels of ‘identity, representation, production, consumption, or self-regulation’ (p. 1) and provide spaces where young people actively use the internet to represent themselves and use the online environment for political action and social change. Social media has ensured that it is no longer necessary for physical locations to explore issues of social and sexual identities (Nash & Gorman‐Murray, 2014). But this scenario is sullied by issues of cyberbullying which has led to suicides among young LGBTQ youth (Norton, 2016). Studies comparing international countries and their use of SNS to mobilize and educate LGBTQ audiences are rare and are necessary to expand our understanding of communication in the networked sphere, especially with regard to specialized and marginalized groups like LGBTQs.

**Social media use in India and Taiwan**

The Internet in India has a relatively small penetration rate of 34.8 percent (Internet Live Stats 2016). Underdeveloped infrastructure and rates of illiteracy besides the expense of buying computer equipment keep internet use low. Gallup research shows that men dominate user statistics (61%) while a mere 39 % women are online. A 2017 report released by investment firm Omidyar Network showed that users in India spends 200 minutes a day on mobile apps, lower than the US average of 300 minutes a day and a majority of this is spent on Facebook and WhatsApp, besides music and entertainment apps. India comprises 11% of Facebook’s global audiences in April 2017 (Statistica, 2017). Pew Research (2014), says, that in keeping with trends from most developing nations, Indians use social networks to stay in touch with family and friends (90% of social networking users). In rural areas, new technologies promote individualistic mobility, but Indian youth of small towns and rural places still live in collective social structures that shape their orientations (Pathak-Shelat & DeShano, 2014). Despairingly, even in 2017, the report said that women are 36 % less likely to own a mobile phone and comprise only 35 % of mobile Internet users and 25 % of Facebook users. Taiwan has one of the highest rates of Internet penetration in the world. Nearly 82.5 percent of Taiwanese households have Internet access (Taiwan Institute for Information Industry, 2017; Liu, 2015). As of the third quarter of 2017, 80 percent of the population in Taiwan were active social media users. The most popular social network was Facebook with a 77 percent penetration rate (Statistica, 2017).

Among Facebook users, Taiwanese college students represent users from a collectivist culture, for whom being socially informed and connected is the foremost concern (Alhabash, Park, Kononova, Chiang, & Wise, 2012). Photo sharing is one of the main reasons Taiwanese use social media. More than half (57%) of Taiwanese citizens use social media for news each week, mainly Facebook, Line, and YouTube. Like many other Asian countries, Taiwan also has a tradition of online bulletin boards (Lin & Lee, 2017). Media gaze in Taiwan may be homophobic and news coverage may be lacking in objectivity, but Taiwanese society offers considerable press freedom which is taken advantage of by Taiwanese journalists to enforce accountability from public officials (Pain, & Chen, 2019). In the political scenario, political parties in Taiwan give social media a lot of importance since young people are very active on social media and it is the main channel for youth to follow election information (Dapeng & Chunying, 2016). While the internet has created hitherto unheard-of affordances for collective identity creation, connection and articulation of views that find that little space offline, it is important to consider how such views and identities are framed to mobilize audiences for education and mobilization.

**Framing as a theoretical approach**

Frames are more than just categories – they organize and structure, helping illuminate meanings embedded within the text (Reese, 2007); helping “to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action” (Benford & Snow, 2000; p. 614). The work of social movement organizations is to produce, negotiate and maintain interpretive collective action frames (Benford & Snow, 2005; Adler, 2012). Collective action frames, say Benford and Snow (2000), perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the “world out there,” but in a manner that is “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow, Worden, & Benford, 1986:198). Collective action frames are primarily action-oriented sets of beliefs that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations and they differ from Goffman’s “schemata of interpretation” by being the “outcome of negotiated shared meanings” (Snow & Benford, 2000:614). They are characterized by action-oriented functions interactive, discursive processes that attend to these core-framing tasks and thus are generative of collective action frames (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992).

How are collective action frames constructed? They are created, as shared meanings are negotiated, between social actors and their audiences about issues, understandings of problems that need solutions, find agents to blame, find solutions and encourage group action (Snow & Benford, 2005). Snow & Benford (1988) build on Wilson's (1973) decomposition of ideology and identify three core functions of collective action frames. The core functions comprise “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing (to suggest solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem),” and “motivational framing (serves as a call to arms or rationale for action).” The value of framing as a theory also lies in the way it bridges parts of the field that need to be in touch with each other: quantitative and qualitative, empirical, and interpretive (Reese, 2007). Scheufele (2004) noted framing studies often reduces frames to simple descriptions of events that fail to highlight the insights and the subtleties that characterize public discourse and social movement areas are not considered. Thus, interviews with LGBTQ activists will broaden our understanding of the nuances of this use as well. In this light this study examines the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the common topics LGBTQ activists in Taiwan and India post about on social media?

RQ2: How do LGBTQ activists in Taiwan and India frame issues on social media?

RQ3: How do LGBTQ activists in Taiwan and India use social media to educate and mobilize audiences?

RQ4: How can the potential of social media be further extended for LBGTQ activism?

**Methodology**

This mixed methods paper analyses a total of 4500 Tweets and 2000 Facebook posts in Taiwan, from the year January 2016 to December 2017, spanning a time period of 24 months to understand how messages were framed, what the common topics were and how social media was used during two extremely important events in India and Taiwan. 1022 Facebook comments and 600 Tweets discussing LGBTQQ issues in Taiwan were analyzed. 978 Facebook comments and 1400 tweets were analyzed from India. The unit of analysis was each tweet or post that fell within the frames selected during this time period. A content analysis of the tweets and posts were done to isolate the frames. The Facebook posts, comments and Tweets were taken from LGBT groups on Facebook and Twitter as when as individuals posts and tweets from the activists interviewed. The codes for content analyzing the articles were operationalized on Snow & Benford’s (1988) description of such frames and include the “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing (to suggest solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem),” and “motivational framing (serves as a call to arms or rationale for action).” The codebook was adapted from the framing codes developed by Harlow & Johnson (2011). This analysis draws upon 60 semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ activists from various Indian and Taiwanese cities. To find participants, we asked for referrals from colleagues as well as posted requests on Twitter and Facebook, social media groups for LGBTQ populations, and on certain private LGBTQ listservs of organizations working in the area. The activists were asked about the importance of SNS in their mobilizing efforts; their use of social media; the kind of reach SNS have; the ways they framed issues and how could the potential of SNS be improved to make it more effective. The sample was a snowball one (Browne, 2005) which allowed access to participants with minimum intervention and influence on responses. Interviews were conducted either in person or over the phone, from May 2, 2017, to March 15, 2018. The length of the interviews ranged from 25 to 50 minutes. A series of open-ended questions, asking about what motivated their activism, their views on social media, how social media aided or impeded their activism and how they framed their messages online were asked. McCracken’s (1988, 85) long interview technique was used which allows researchers to “step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.” The data were coded into categories by grouping together interrelated ideas (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003), and reviewed multiple times, for critical understanding and manifest meaning.

**Results**

**RQ1: What are the common topics LGBTQ activists in Taiwan and India post about on social media?**

The total corpus of 1022 Facebook posts and 600 Tweets centered around LGBTQQ issues in Taiwan were analyzed. 978 Facebook comments and 1400 tweets were examined from India. For both countries, the two broad topics are pro-LGBTQ and anti-LGBTQ tweets and comments. In Taiwan, 68.9% of the comments and tweets were pro LGBTQ and 31.1% were anti LGBTQ rights. 17.1% of the anti-LGBTQ rights comments use insulting word, such as “bastard,” “abnormal,” “pervert,” “devil.” For example, “Those who obtain human rights also have right to buy kids, so human is buyable via sperm bank. These bastards raise a lot of ethical issues.” The most common topics were “marriage” and “adoption” followed closely by “family”. Gender too was an oft refereed to topic, though in a denigrating way. For example, one Facebook comment (from Taiwan), said, “For example, “God creates one to penetrate and the other to be penetrated.”

In India, 78% of the comments were insulting and anti-LGBTQ rights. Words like “dirty”, “abnormal” and “dishonor” were used 80% of the times either as tweets or as comments. The most common topics were “coming out”, “abnormal” and “help”. An oft repeated sentence was “These are our rights.” Only 10% of the topics centered on marriage. Most of the conversation around the topic were crouched in terms of despair; for example: “Will I ever know a partner like my parents do, in love and marriage?” (Facebook Post, 2016). Even though we examined SNS interactions before, during and after the Right to Privacy ruling, we did not find significant references to privacy. While activists did post of issues of privacy explain how the Right to Privacy would hurt LGBTQ populations who still had not come out, audiences showed a limited engagement with the concept. The word “privacy” was used in only 30% of the tweets (directly dealing the issue) and 15% of Facebook comments. The Tweets were aimed at either support or were clearly anti. Closed Facebook groups saw audiences asking for information on coming out and health related issues. These groups were sites of active mobilization and education. Activists gave help and advice; pointing out resources’ participants could use as well as posting information about rallies and marches.

In both the countries, SNS was most commonly used for rallies and information about protests. In India, particularly, much of the Facebook posts (60%) were also aimed to point people to resources. Helplines and phone numbers of support groups were prominently posted. In Taiwan, SNS were sites where LGBTQ rights were protected, and anti LGBTQ speech was countered. There was less information about resources for audiences. Also, comments did not directly ask for helpful resources or support.

**RQ2: How do LGBTQ activists in Taiwan and India frame issues on social media?**

In India the diagnostic frame (problem identification and attributions) was used 90% of the times followed by the motivational frame (serves as a call to arms or rationale for action). The prognostic frame (to suggest solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem) was used the least. In Taiwan, the prognostic and diagnostic frame was used the most followed by the motivational frame. Interviews with the activists illustrated why their choice of framing. In India battling extreme social prejudice is an issue and as the activists said they had to ensure that the issue was understood well. “We always talk about LGBT issues as a human rights issue,” explained one activist. “We have to motivate people to work together for rights.” Explaining the issue, clearly stating the problem (that LGBT rights were human rights and deserved to be treated as such) and that beating prejudice was a collective act. The solution to the problems faced by LGBTQ populations was obvious and thus, as the activists stated, they “did not discuss that much (Personal Interview, 2017).” In Taiwan, since LGBT rights were recognized by law, diagnosing social bias, and accessing homophobia was important. Since legal rights were recognized, there was little use of the mobilizing frame to work for larger issues. “Our main issue is that while legally we are acceptable, societally we are not,” explained one activist. “This is the obvious problem, so we need to suggest solutions to this. Changing attitudes is complex and hard (2017).”

**RQ3 & R4: Mobilizing audiences and extending the potential of social media.**

The 60 participants from India and Taiwan had about three to seven years of experience using social media like Twitter and Facebook to advocate for LGBTQ issues. Some were very active, posting almost daily on LBGT issues. Others were supportive but choose to be “low key” (Personal Interview, 2018) advocates because they did not want to be perceived as “aggressive” (Personal Interview, 2018) LGBTQ advocates. In Taiwan, LGBTQQ advocates are often stigmatized as being a part of the “rainbow hegemony”; people who forced others to accept that everything LGBTQ is right. In India, advocates were most vocal on closed groups; five had not yet come out to their families and others said that being their advocacy often set off “horrific” online trolling where threats of death and rape were more the norm than not. Key themes that emerged from the interviews included:

 “Facebook and Twitter are great, but we need more….”

In, India, Twitter clearly was the platform of choice where people could post links to news and educational materials available online, but Facebook proved a better medium for self-expression. Often Twitter was used to draw crowds in while Facebook was better for explicating concepts. Twitters’ limited use of characters proved to be a disadvantage. For example, as one activist said: We create a sort of trailer here for the work we are doing. For example, regarding the Right to Privacy, we ran a campaign around, ‘What does privacy mean to you?’. When we had a number of responses, we posted links to our Facebook pages where we could talk about the issue in greater detail. It gave so much insight into what audiences were actually thinking of privacy. (Personal Interview, 2017) Facebook pages provided rich details of the way LGBTQ populations understood and processed concepts of privacy. Few real names or accounts were used. Fear was a predominating aspect of conversations on Facebook. It was the questions raised, queries posted, and experiences shared that helped activists reach populations that still had not openly identified as LGBTQ and helped them connect with resources they could use. This also gave activists an idea of what resources were available in a particular area and where the gaps lay. Taiwanese activists used Facebook more than Twitter. They posted articles, analysis and bolstered them up by sharing personal stories. Posting articles did not always get much of a response but sharing a personal story certainly did. As one participant said, posts that showed her participating in LGBTQQ demonstrations got much more likes than articles. Both Indian and Taiwanese activists said that to spread information Facebook these days was expensive (Facebook requires a fee to boost posts to reach new audiences) and that made their work hard. In India, activists from smaller towns did not have credit cards. Often resources to use online was hard to come by. Activists in Taiwan ensured that they posted information when most people were on Facebook, during breakfast, and lunch time. They avoided posting during ties when people were getting off work or late at night when people were asleep. They tried to keep their posts as relevant and up to date with the news as possible. Activists agreed that that SNS had also reduced their dependence on mainstream media, which was not always sympathetic to their cause. A focus group of six activists from India made clear that while Facebook and Twitter were effective mediums for disseminating messages, it always helped to “see people physically” (Personal Interview, 2017). While events are organized online, it was their impact offline, with the number of people joining a rally, voicing opinions in real time, and marching in a show of physical solidarity that makes the real difference in changing opinions and minds.

“Social media is effective but….”

Activists from both countries believe that twitter and Facebook are extremely helpful but much more needs to be done than just campaigns online. For example, while Facebook in Taiwan is extremely popular, activists wondered about people who were not on it. In India issues of access meant that only a very limited number of people could be informed through SNS. In India, activists especially wondered about women; traditionally marginalized and cut off from technology and education. They emphasized that while social media was effective in mobilizing and enhancing knowledge among populations; they were able to do this among mostly urban populations where access and education was guaranteed. In that sense, they were among the many tools, such audiences had to learn more and express their opinions. In India, activists were clear that SNS alone were not enough. Technologies like WhatsApp also aided them and added to the reach afforded by SNS. As one participant said, “WhatsApp lets people record messages that do not require literacy skills.” (2017) Activists in Taiwan used “Line” (a social medium similar to What’s app) to reach those not on Facebook.

Trolls and misogyny online

India is an extremely patriarchal society, and it is worse online. LGBTQ activists are often the target of vicious online trolling that takes emotional tolls and often prevents them from reaching out for those wanting support. As one participant said: The word most commonly used is ‘dirty’, about how dirty we are. (Personal Interview, 2018). The activists involved with lesbian related activism, especially, female activists, were targets and they said that this harassment online often prevented them from even starting conversations online. As one activist said, “We often have to stay hidden in our lives. Even the online space now isn’t safe.” (Personal Interview, 2018). Women activists drew more ire than males. Lesbian issues drew more negative attention than homosexual issues. Lesbianism related posts also drew more “sexualized” attacks with threats of physical harm. Activists in Taiwan are not free from such attacks either. Participants said they had noted that often trolls would counter the information, which could be about rallies or articles, with clearly “unthoughtful” (Personal Interview, 2018) comments. For example: one post on same sex marriage had a pastor commenting that “if people are allowed to marry someone who is same sex, then, people should be allowed to marry a Ferris wheel if they want to.” Refuting this comment elicited furious responses from the groups that oppose same-sex marriage. None of the comments were logical or designed to educate the larger public about the pros and cons of the issue. One participant said that she did not believe that irrational attacks were a good strategy, but it incited a lot of comments and drew attention to the post. Often the activists would jump into the conversation and try hard to correct misconceptions. Gender in Taiwan also elicited misogyny online. Most of it came from those “who clearly had not read the post, knew little about the issue and was clearly against LGBTQ people. (Personal Interview, 2018). Female activists were routinely trolled; their age and gender eliciting comments. For example: one participant said, she was called “young lady” and her age emphasized to indicate she knew nothing. Men who trolled activists were often supported by other men who ‘liked’ their comments. Both Taiwanese and Indiana activists agreed that SNS need to be made safer; is they were to survive as spaces where countercultures flourished.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Taiwan with its LGBTQ marriage laws, predominantly urban culture and vast internet penetration seems on the surface so much more LGBTQ friendly than India with her archaic laws, low internet adoption rates as well as clearly patriarchal social structures that keep women away from accessing education and technology. But, as this analysis of the social media content and, especially, the interviews with the activists, show, that while legal progress is always welcome; real change towards equality is complex. Taiwan might have some of the most progressive LGBTQ laws, but conservative societal attitudes ensure that true equality is yet to be achieved. While progressive laws did create an atmosphere where people did not have to stay repressed, the most common subjects discussed online showed clearly that restrictive laws pertaining to marriage and adoption diluted freedoms. For example, while LGBTQ populations can marry and adopt in Taiwan, they cannot use assistive reproductive technologies to have children. In India, where LGBTQ populations are essentially illegal, marriage is a distant dream; so, conversations still revolve around the attainment of basic rights. LGBTQ laws still remain controversial and such populations marginalized. This to a certain extend explains the differences between the frames used by activists in the two countries. In India, where homosexuality, identifying issues are foremost and followed by mobilizing people to work for equality. In Taiwan, the legality is problematic and needs revision; thus, prognostic, and diagnostic frames are used the most to identify and resolve issues. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people might have different needs yet the discrimination they face are similar (Thoreson, 2012). Taiwan with a progressive legal system still suffers deep homophobia which is articulated online using insults and sarcasm.

Gender is a common area that remains contested in both countries. In India, a combination of patriarchy and homophobia shows that while male and female activists are trolled, it’s the lesbian who has to bear the brunt of being lesbian and a woman. In Taiwan, posts decrying the ‘unnaturalness’ of homosexuality puts women down to emphasize the sanctity of heterosexual relationships. This prevents the strategic contextualizing of their struggle; most conversation degenerate into medleys of insults and threats, that serve no constructive purpose. Activists in Taiwan are abused too. The word “fuck” is common, but it is a more reactive expression used by people who have clearly not read or understood the post. SNS have provided spaces for people of counter-normative sexualities to forge connections and articulate voices that have little space elsewhere (Taylor, Falconer, & Snowdon, 2014). For example, in India, activists post resources to help those coming out and answer other questions. Both Taiwan and India have media devoted to LGBTQ causes but its SNS that keep regular conversations going and take campaigns international.

Facebook, both in India and Taiwan, provide the space for more nuanced discussion but Facebook charges to increase reach, thus, often negatively affecting its use. In India, Twitter being so public prevents audiences from sharing concerns and opinions for fear of reprisal. While SNS have provided forums for discussion, education, and mobilization, it is not mature enough to be effective sites of queer counter publics (Soriano, 2014). The most effective addition of SNS has been the role it has played in reducing the dependence of LGBTQ activism on traditional media (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). Today, on SNS, activists strive to build identities and promote a rights-based approach with a hitherto unheard-of immediacy. The spread of SNS has produced new spaces for deliberation, but also works to attack queer representations. There is no denying the positive value of SNS in mobilization but in a country like India, the low internet penetration keeps certain public, especially the rural poor, away from such informative pages. Just as in India, other technologies like WhatsApp supplement the work done on SNS, in highly connected Taiwan, apps like Line help reach audiences not on SNS. Activists from both countries agreed that SNS had lent positive dimensions to their work, increasing reach, gathering diverse audiences together and, especially, in the sphere of spreading of information about LGBTQ rights and rallies.

The most important aspect of SNS was its contribution in enabling people to lend support and create connective structures that transcended barriers, both geographic and economic. It also helped them get a measure of the resources LGBTQ people had access to, especially in smaller towns (India) and those battling conservative attitudes (Taiwan). SNS also greatly enhanced activism on the ground. But issues of access and online trolling heavily marred the transformative potential of SNS in both countries. This was particularly negative in the cases of lesbians online where patriarchy and misogyny offline found fierce and virulent expression online. But for women, the anonymity of the online sphere enabled an unprecedented level of self-expression. Today, LGBTQ activists in India and Taiwan have added another agenda to their focus; ensuring that the online sphere is a safer space for marginalized sexual minorities.

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