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Old and New Media: Converging During the Pakistan Emergency

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Introduction

On March 13, 2007, a few days after Pakistan's president General Pervez Musharraf suspended the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, an online petition condemning the government's abuse of the independent judiciary was circulated via mailing lists and blogs.[1] But over the course of several weeks, the petition only attracted 1,190 signatories. Less than a year later, in February 2008, Dawn, the country's leading English-language media group, launched a citizen journalism initiative, inviting Pakistanis to submit images, ideas, news reports, and analyses that they wanted to share with the world.

In a matter of months, the Pakistani media landscape evolved from a point where a politically relevant online petition failed to gain momentum to one where a prominent mass media group felt the need to include citizen journalists in the process of news gathering. This paper aims to explain why this evolution occurred, how it was facilitated by both old and new media, and what impact it had on the political process and civic engagement.

To that end, the paper describes how certain communities – for example, university students – came to use digital technologies and new media platforms to organize for political action and report on matters of public interest. In *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, Yochai Benkler advances the concept of a networked public sphere. With reference to the internet and online tools, he argues that the networked information economy produces a public sphere because "the cost of being a speaker ... is several orders of magnitude lower than the cost of speaking in the mass-mediated environment"[2]. He adds, "the easy possibility of

communicating effectively into the public sphere allows individuals to reorient themselves from passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation." In Benkler's words, then, this paper shows how some Pakistanis became "speakers and participants" in the political process. Enabled to create a networked public sphere, they began in the spring of 2007 to participate, reciprocate, and engage in many-to-many rather than one-to-many communications.

Interestingly, a networked public sphere emerged during a time of heightened political instability that has been colloquially termed the 'Pakistan Emergency' (March 2007-February 2008).[3] Digital technologies that were harnessed during this time for political advocacy, community organizing, and hyperlocal reporting include cellphones, camera phones (mobile-connected cameras), SMS text messages, online mailing lists, and internet broadcasts (live audio and visual streams). Meanwhile, popular new media platforms utilized during the Pakistan Emergency include blogs (live blogging), YouTube, Flickr, Facebook and other social networking or sociable media sites.[4]

Writing about mass-mediated markets that are slowly inundated with new media tools, Benkler points out that a transition occurs "as the capabilities of both systems converge, to widespread availability of the ability to register and communicate observations in text, audio, and video, wherever we are and whenever we wish"[5]. During the Pakistan Emergency, a similar convergence of old – that is, traditional broadcast – and new media occurred. In a time of turmoil and censorship, Pakistanis were driven by a desire to access information and thus turned to multiple media sources when the mainstream media was compromised. One could say the media landscape became hydra-headed during the Pakistan Emergency: if one source was blocked or banned, another one was appropriated to get the word out. For example, when the government banned news channels during the November 2007 state of emergency, private television channels uploaded news clips to YouTube and live streamed their content over the internet, thus motivating Pakistanis to go online. In this context, the mainstream media showed the ability to be as flexible, diffuse, and collaborative as new media platforms.

A combined use of digital technologies and new media tools also helped bridge the digital divide in a country where only 17 million people have internet access and the literacy rate is less than 50 percent. In "Democracy and New Media in Developing Nations: Opportunities and Challenges", Adam Clayton Powell describes how the internet can help open up developing democracies:

> Many argue that in much of the world, the Internet reaches only elites: government officials and business leaders, university professors and students, the wealthy and the influential. But through Net-connected

elites information from the Internet reaches radio listeners and newspaper readers around the world, so the Internet has an important secondary readership, those who hear or are influenced by online information via its shaping of more widely distributed media, outside of traditional, controlled media lanes of the past.[6]

No doubt, traditional broadcast media relay information from the internet to the Pakistani public. But the national "secondary readership" was established in a far more dynamic and participatory way during the Pakistan Emergency thanks to the prevalence of cellphones and the popularity of SMS text messaging. Indeed, this paper shows how citizen reporting and calls for organized political action were distributed through a combination of mailing lists, online forums, and SMS text messages. Emails forwarded to net-connected elites containing calls for civic action against an increasingly authoritarian regime inevitably included synopses that were copied as SMS text messages and circulated well beyond cyberspace. This two-tiered use of media helped inculcate a culture of citizenship in Pakistanis from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, the media landscape witnessed a convergence of old and new media technologies that also led to widespread civic engagement and greater connection across social boundaries.

Despite such multivalent uses, this paper shows that the overall impact of digital and new media tools in Pakistan has been nebulous. After all, General Musharraf's dictatorial regime retained control over access to the internet and other communications infrastructure throughout the period of widespread civic engagement. As an increasing number of Pakistanis turned to YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, and SMS text messages as alternate media portals, the government clamped down on these sources. Between March 2007 and February 2008, cellphone networks were jammed, internet service providers were instructed to block the YouTube website, internet connectivity was limited or shut down, and blogging softwares were banned. Moreover, the authorities came to monitor the public's use of new media platforms: images of anti-government rallies posted to Flickr were used to identify and arrest protesters.

The only antidote to the government's control of digital and new media tools, this paper shows, was the widening of the networked public sphere to include Pakistanis in the diaspora and global media sources. For example, when the government blocked news channels and jammed cellular networks in November 2007, young Pakistanis across the globe continued to plan and organize protest rallies via the social networking site Facebook. Similarly, when university students demanding the restoration of an independent judiciary realized that security officials had prevented journalists from covering their protest, they submitted self-generated video clips and images to CNN's iReport, an online citizen journalism initiative. Indeed, as Pakistan's

media landscape became a hybrid model in which professional and amateur journalists generated and disseminated news by whatever means possible, international mainstream media outfits such as CNN, the BBC, and the UK-based Channel 4 increasingly sought out hyperlocal reporting posted to local blogs, YouTube, and Facebook.

Ultimately, this paper identifies how the means of communication in Pakistan became dispersed, accessible, and decentralized, leading to a freer flow of information during the Pakistan Emergency. By focusing on how Pakistanis have harnessed digital technologies and new media platforms, the paper aims to illuminate the way for Pakistan to become a full-fledged digital democracy... By analyzing digital technologies in the context of existing technologies and social practices in Pakistan, the paper emphasizes the importance of real-world deployment. It shows that users adopt and adapt tools in a way that responds to local needs. As such, the paper can be considered a call for members of the civic media community to design tools that bridge the digital divide, adapt to local circumstances, and are flexible enough that different communities can use them in creative and relevant ways. After all, as Benkler puts it, "the networked public sphere is not made of tools, but of social production practices that these tools enable"[7].

Media Vacuum: Blocking Independent Television in Pakistan

November 3, 2007: State of Emergency Declared

President Musharraf's declaration of a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, arguably had a greater impact on Pakistan's media landscape than on its political history. The manner in which the government handled media outlets during the emergency, which ended on December 15, 2007, demonstrated the vulnerability of mainstream media and created an opportunity for the systematic, sustained, and nationwide use of new media platforms. Indeed, barely five years after independent television stations were established as the go-to medium for news and infotainment for one-third of Pakistan's 150-million strong population,[8] Musharraf's crackdown on news channels during the emergency demonstrated how easily the boom could go bust. During emergency rule, a media vacuum was created that allowed for the rise of new media outlets as viable alternatives for information dissemination and community organizing. Mediated practices that facilitated civic engagement and citizen journalism during the six-week-long emergency continue to be widely adopted and refined.

On November 3, soon after proclaiming emergency rule in a televised address, Musharraf demanded that cable television operators block the broadcasts of all local and foreign news channels, except those of the state-owned Pakistan Television Corporation. Nearly 30 privately owned channels were promptly taken off the air. The next day, policemen raided the Islamabad offices of Aaj TV, an independent news channel, and attempted to confiscate the channel's equipment. The telephone lines of Pakistan's first independent news channel Geo TV were cut and their broadcasters were threatened with long jail terms...[9]

Tightening Control in the Run-up to Emergency Rule

Ironically, the very media freedom that Musharraf stifled was one of the hallmarks of his rule until the emergency declaration. After coming to power in 1999, he increased freedom for the print media and liberalized broadcasting policies to mitigate the perception that military rulers are authoritarian. In March 2002, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was established to induct the private sector into the field of electronic media. Since then, 56 privately owned television channels have been licensed in Pakistan[10] and 48 were fully operational as of May 2008. Geo TV became Pakistan's first private news channel in 2002.

The recent proliferation of independent television channels is a marked departure for the Pakistani media landscape, which had been dominated by the state-owned channel Pakistan Television (PTV) until the early 1990s. In the previous decade, access to international satellite television channels, via illegal satellite dishes, had many Pakistanis tuning in to Indian channels such as Zee TV and other regional offerings via Star TV, the Asian news and entertainment network owned by News Corp. These illegal channels gained popularity as they circumvented the censorship and religiosity that defined Pakistani media throughout the 1990s.

Since 2002, independent news channels had been operating with unprecedented freedom as per Musharraf's directives. Cable television thus become the fastest growing media property in Pakistan: subscribers increased from 1.5 million to 3.27 million from July 2004 to July 2007, meaning that one-third of all Pakistanis had access to private news channels in 2007.[11] News content was increasingly investigative and often openly critical of the government. However, signs that the mainstream media remained vulnerable to the government's whims began appearing well before the emergency declaration of November 2007.

The freedom of the newly empowered broadcast media was first questioned in October 2005, when a deadly earthquake struck the country's northern areas. As a reporter for The Christian Science Monitor put it: "Pakistan's

earthquake, while at once a story of national tragedy, is also the coming of age story of the country's fledgling private television channels. Their unflinching coverage of the disaster... showcases an era of unparalleled media freedom and influence. But it has also, by creating rifts with the government, under-scored the very limits of that newfound freedom"[12]. Media coverage of the government's response to the disaster – often featuring angry villagers criticizing the Pakistan Army's inefficient or corrupt relief efforts – highlighted official shortcomings and portrayed the true extent of the disaster that the government was slow to acknowledge. The regularity with which the govern-ment was criticized in the months following the earthquake established the electronic media's watchdog role and approach to news coverage, which was biased toward analysis rather than objective reporting...

From Small Screen to Satellite and YouTube

... After most channels were blocked during the emergency, two independent news channels made every effort to continue live broadcasts. Geo TV and ARY One World, another independent station, transmitted live broadcasts from their bureaus in Dubai. The news that some independent news channels were continuing to broadcast prompted Pakistanis across the country to obtain illegal satellite dishes – which had declined in popularity since the 1990s – so as to continue receiving independent coverage of the unfolding political crisis from their favorite news anchors and broadcast journalists. Despite a prompt government ban on the purchase of satellite dishes, they sold like "hotcakes"[13].

The fact that Pakistanis resorted to satellite dishes in the wake of the govern-ment ban indicates that broadcast media were considered the most important form of news delivery in Pakistan (the English- and Urdu-language print media was not censored during the emergency, nor did they see an increase in sales). Interestingly, it was this desire to seek out live television broadcasts that also drove many Pakistanis to the internet, in many cases, for the first time.

Geo TV, ARY One World, and Aaj TV live streamed their coverage on the stations' websites.[14] As soon as Geo TV initiated live streams, its website reg-istered 300,000 simultaneous users, up from 100,000 before the emergency. Through November, the site received as many as 700,000 hits after breaking news. News broadcasts featuring important updates were also uploaded both by station producers and users to YouTube to allow for easy circulation.[15] Moreover, websites such as Pakistan Policy compiled streaming audio and video content from the independent news channels to allow users across the country and diaspora to enjoy uninterrupted news reporting on political events.[16] Initially, then, broad Pakistani interest in finding news online was an example of old and new media colluding: content was produced by traditional

media outlets and intended for consumption along the one-to-many model. But the distribution of that content was diffuse and collaborative...

The weeks during which all independent electronic news outlets were completely shut down or censored by the government marked a significant turning point in the Pakistani media landscape. It was in this media vacuum that other alternatives began to flourish: the public realized that to fulfill its hunger for news in a time of political crisis, it had to participate in both the production and dissemination of information. Activist communities established blogs and generated original news coverage of hyperlocal events, such as anti-emergency protests on university campuses. Civilians increasingly used SMS text messages to keep each other informed about the unfolding political crisis and coordinate protest marches. Young Pakistanis across the diaspora created discussion groups on the social networking site Facebook to debate the pros and cons of emergency rule.

Overheard: FM Radio and Public Participation

The Pakistani public's ability to use both old media and new digital technologies to ensure communications flow was demonstrated before the imposition of emergency rule. Indeed, before citizen journalists turned determinedly to blogs and social networking sites, citizens had been using FM radio broadcasts and cellphones as a way to organize and disseminate information. The emergent, ad hoc, and hyperlocal networked public spheres thus created served the public well under emergency rule.

Despite the burgeoning popularity of FM radio stations – by July 2008, there were nine operational FM radio stations in Karachi and 162 licensed stations nationwide[17] – the medium did not emerge as a site for civic engagement or community building. This is because unlike television, all FM radio stations – whether state- or privately-owned – were forbidden even before the Emergency from broadcasting news, current affairs shows, or any time-bound content with political implications...

Unable to provide news updates, Karachi's most popular community radio station, Apna Karachi FM 107, negotiated violent flare-ups in the city by issuing regular "traffic reports" which followed the law but signaled the real situation. On May 12, 2007 – when Karachi was affected by violent rallies, widespread gun battles, and the indiscriminate torching of vehicles after Chief Justice Chaudhry was prevented from properly visiting the city – the station punctuated its programming at five-minute intervals with these special "traffic updates."

Throughout the tumultuous afternoon, the station's radio journalists – reporting on the move via cellphones – called to indicate which roads were

heavily congested, which were blocked, and which were seeing only sporadic traffic. Karachiites accustomed to urban conflict understand that the density of traffic hints at the relative safety of a road or neighborhood – after all, traffic thins out in areas where gunbattles are underway.

At 11:57 a.m. that day, the reporter Mohammad Qayyum stated: "the roads to the airport are empty. Public transport is at a standstill and the few taxis and rickshaws operating in the area have inflated their fares." Just after noon, he alerted drivers, "although we had earlier told you that Mai Kolachi Road was seeing normal traffic, we are now suggesting that you take a diversion and choose an alternate route." At 12:22 p.m., his colleague Waqarul Hasan reported, "buses have been torched near Karsaz, so people wanting to come to Drigh Road shouldn't head in this direction because traffic is bad." Later in the afternoon, the radio journalist Waqar Azmat advised drivers to avoid the area known as Gurumandir, "because the conditions there are not good, there is no traffic in the area." A few minutes later, at 2:26 p.m., he returned to the airwaves to say, "traffic on Shaheed-e-Millat Road is very bad, as it is on Sharah-e-Faisal. There's madness all the way until Tipu Sultan Road. Drivers should choose their routes carefully so that they don't become *victims of bad traffic*."

In its efforts to stay within the law while also providing coverage of violence throughout the city, Apna Karachi FM 107 was aided by Karachiites themselves. Throughout the day, hundreds of people called the station, from their cars, homes, and workplaces, to report on the traffic situation – and thus the security situation. For example, at 3:15 p.m. the station broadcast this call: "I'm Akhtar calling from my office on Shahrah-e-Faisal Road. I cannot leave right now because there are no buses on the road. They say buses will resume here by 5 p.m." Calls such as these helped Karachiites keep each other informed about which spots in the city were dangerous at any given time…

Subsequently, a similar combination of FM radio broadcasts, landline phones, and cellphones were used by Karachiites to create a networked public sphere and monitor protest rallies through the cities during emergency rule and general elections. This shows how people empowered by creativity and a commitment to aiding their community can use old and new media technologies to make a difference, even on an ad hoc basis.

Disconnected: Jamming Cellular Networks

November 6, 2007: Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry Addresses the Nation

As the public adopted alternative media platforms, the government escalated its efforts to control communication and news dissemination. On November 6, the ousted chief justice of the Supreme Court, who had been placed under house arrest when emergency rule was declared, chose to address the nation via cellphone. In his talk, he called for mass protests against the government and the immediate restoration of the constitution. Justice Chaudhry placed a conference call to members of the Bar Association, who relayed his message via loudspeakers. That broadcast was intended to be further relayed by members of the crowd who had planned to simply hold their cellphones up to the loudspeakers to allow remote colleagues and concerned citizens to listen in on the address. More ambitious members of the crowd planned to record the message on their cellphones and subsequently distribute it online.

However, most mobile phone services in Islamabad went down during Chaudhry's address, prompting suspicions that they had been jammed by the government.[18] In the first few days of the emergency, sporadic efforts to cut telephone lines and jam cellphone networks were common, even though the telecommunications infrastructure in Pakistan is privately owned. Mobile connectivity at the Supreme Court, protest sites, and the homes of opposition politicians and lawyers who were placed under house arrest was jammed at different times. In off-the-record interviews, employees at telecommunications companies explained that the government had threatened to revoke their operating licenses in the event that they did not comply with jamming requests.

The government's attempts to jam cellphone networks during the emergency demonstrates that, much like television, cellphones had become an integral medium of information dissemination and community organizing across Pakistan. This is not surprising given that cellphones have been the most rapidly adopted – and adapted – technology in Pakistan's history.

Between the late 1990s and July 2006, mobile penetration in Pakistan increased from 0.2 percent of the population to an unprecedented 43.6 percent.[19] Months before the emergency declaration, in August 2007, there were 68.5 million mobile phone users across Pakistan, which amounts to 60 percent of the total potential cellphone market in Pakistan...[20]

SMS text messaging also played a large role in helping communities organize protests during the emergency. Owing to the low literacy rate and the non-availability of mobile platforms in local languages, SMS traffic has remained

low. That said, 2007 saw a marked increase to 8,636 million text messages exchanged from 1,206 million in 2006.[21] On July 20, 2007, when the Justice Chaudhry was first reinstated, 400 million SMS messages were sent nation-wide. According to the PTA, that is the highest number of SMS generated in one day in Pakistan. But mobile service providers claim that a record number of SMS messages were exchanged in the five days after emergency rule was declared (statistics to support this fact are not available). No doubt, in the absence of independent news channels, text messaging emerged as an instantaneous way for people to update each other on developments such as protest rallies and the numerable arrests of lawyers, journalists, and activists. In the early days of the emergency, SMS text messaging was lauded across the Pakistani blogosphere as the savior of communication in a time of crisis.

Student Activism / Digital Activism

November 7, 2007: Police Surround the Lahore University of Management Sciences

In the media vacuum created by the censorship of television channels, Pakistani university students turned to new media platforms such as YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, and blogs to facilitate hyper-local reporting, information dissemination, and community organizing against emergency rule. As such, student activism during the Pakistan Emergency was synonymous with digital activism.

On November 7, over 1,000 students of the privately owned Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) – Pakistan's most prestigious business school based in Lahore – gathered to protest the imposition of emergency rule. Students at universities across Pakistan had begun protesting and organizing vigils immediately after Musharraf's televised emergency announcement on November 3. But the gathering at LUMS was among the largest of the civil movement launched by lawyers, journalists, and students against the emergency. (By contrast, about 90 students attended a protest the same day at Lahore's National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, FAST-NU, a federally chartered university.)

The protest took place amidst heavy police presence. Prior to the gathering, policemen warned LUMS students that they would be baton charged and arrested in the event of civil agitation. On the morning of the scheduled protest, police surrounded the campus, while plainclothes officers patrolled its grounds. Still, students managed to march through the campus grounds and eventually staged a sit-in at the main campus entrance, in front of the dozens of police officers. Broadcast journalists for Geo TV and other stations that were continuing to provide live coverage of emergency-related events

via satellite and internet streams were present to cover the LUMS protest. However, police officials successfully prevented media personnel from entering the LUMS campus and eventually confiscated their cameras and other recording equipment. After successfully removing all journalists from the premises, the police ramped up their presence on the campus grounds.

Creating the News, Organizing the Community

Once LUMS students realized that major Pakistani news networks had not been able to cover their protest, they took it upon themselves to document the authorities' intimidation tactics and their own attempts at resistance. Midway through the day-long protest, a student narrated the morning's events in a post on The Emergency Times blog[22], which had been established to help students express their opinions about democracy and organize against emergency rule. This post was then linked to by other blogs, such as Metroblogging Lahore, that are frequented by Pakistani youth.[23] The Emergency Times blog also featured pictures of the protest.

Within an hour of the LUMS protest commencing, a Karachi-based blogger Awab Alvi, who runs the Teeth Maestro blog, also helped those behind The Emergency Times blog set up an SMS2Blog link, which allowed students participating in the protest to post live, minute-by-minute updates to several blogs, including Teeth Maestro, via SMS text message.[24] Students availed of this set up to report on police movement across campus, attempts to corral students in their hostels, the deployment of women police officers across campus, and the activities of LUMS students to resist these actions.

On the night of November 7, students posted video clips of the protest that were shot using handheld digital camcorders or cellphone cameras to YouTube.[25] These videos showed the students gathering to protest, confronting the university's security guards, and the heavy police presence at the university's gates. Many clips focused on protest signs that students were carrying in an attempt to convey their message in spite of the poor audio and visual quality of some of the video clips. Anti-emergency speeches delivered by students were posted in their entirety.

Some students uploaded their video footage of the protest, shot on cellphone cameras, to CNN's iReport website, which solicits contributions from citizen journalists across the globe in the form of video, photos, or blog posts.[26] Footage from iReport was then used in a regular CNN broadcast about the student protests. That CNN broadcast was then posted to YouTube for circulation amongst Pakistanis who no longer had access to the channel because of Musharraf's blanket ban on news programming.[27] Through this confluence of citizen reporting and the international broadcast media, Pakistanis – and a global audience – were informed about the LUMS protest.

Interestingly, between November 3-6, video clips of protests and gatherings at LUMS had been posted to YouTube. But none of these were as well produced or contextualized as those uploaded on November 7. In the days after the emergency, posted videos up to 10 minutes in length were not clearly titled for easy searchability, nor did they provide any explanation of the events portrayed in the footage.[28] In contrast, November 7 video clips were clearly titled and tagged. In many cases, the clips included captions that dated the event, identified the location, and contextualized the students' activities.[29] This difference suggests that university students were aware within days of the emergency that their collectively generated coverage of the campus protests was the primary source of information for those looking for coverage of responses to the political crisis, including local and international journalists. For example, Dawn News, Pakistan's first English-language news channel, first broadcast news of the student protests on November 10 in a clip that was made available via satellite and YouTube.[30]

It is worth nothing that university students became savvier in their use of new media platforms over the course of the emergency. On December 4, policemen and intelligence agents once again surrounded and barricaded the LUMS campus to prevent students and faculty from attending a daily vigil for civil liberties. As soon as police appeared at the LUMS campus, a post warning students that traffic in and out of the university was being inspected appeared on The Emergency Times blog...[31]

In all emergency-related demonstrations between November 3 and December 15, university students posted images from the events to Flickr.[32] However, security forces soon began using these images to identify student activists and subsequently arrest them. In an attempt to one-up the authorities, students began blurring the faces of protestors in images before uploading them to Flickr and other blogs.[33] The fact that the authorities were monitoring new media platforms such as Flickr is an indication of how quickly alternative resources gained influence in the media vacuum created by the television ban.

Meanwhile, young Pakistanis who were unable to join university protests and youth across the diaspora turned to the social networking site Facebook to express solidarity and oppose emergency rule. Within three days of the emergency declaration, a Facebook group titled "We Oppose Emergency in Pakistan" boasted over 5,000 members.[34] The group's homepage featured links to online petitions, up-to-date news reports from the Pakistani print and broadcast media, and blogs with original news content, such as The Emergency Times. Embedded video clips of messages by detained opposition leaders were also uploaded to the Facebook site. The group's discussion board quickly became the site of lively discussion, with teenagers and twenty-somethings – who previously did not have a voice in the Pakistani public sphere – debating the implications of Musharraf's decision. As the emergency

dragged on and the movement to restore the judiciary gained momentum, Facebook was harnessed by diaspora communities as a tool for organizing protests.

…It is not surprising that university students were amongst the first Pakistanis to turn to the internet as a venue for information dissemination in the wake of the television ban. Owing to low literacy rates and high service costs, the internet has not been as widely adopted in Pakistan as cellphones. In December 2007, there were 70 internet service providers covering 2,419 cities and towns in Pakistan, but only 3.5 million internet subscribers. Owing to the popularity of cyber cafes, however, the total number of internet users was estimated by the PTA to be closer to 17 million. Pakistani universities are among the few venues where internet saturation is high: by 2005, over 80% of all university libraries had internet access. And in July 2007, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan enhanced bandwidth four-fold at public sector universities – at private universities, bandwidth was doubled – to facilitate video conferencing and other online communications. Private institutions such as LUMS boast two internet access nodes in each double- or triple-occupancy room.

In times of emergency, The Emergency Times

…The Emergency Times (ET) blog and newsletter exemplify the collision and collusion between old and new media that helped shape civic action against increasingly authoritarian rule. What began as an informative on-campus handout quickly evolved to become the mouthpiece and major news resource for the Student's Action Committee (SAC), the umbrella organization that rallied student activists across Pakistan and the diaspora against Musharraf and his policies.

Launched online on November 5, 2007, ET described itself as "an independent Pakistani student information initiative providing regular updates, commentary, and analysis on Pakistan's evolving political scenario." An early experiment in youth citizen journalism and digital activism, ET became one of the most regular and reliable sources of information about the Pakistani civil society's movement against the government between November 2007 and June 2008. At its height, the blog claims to have reached over 150,000 people in over 100 countries.

Although many students were involved in generating the blog and its accompanying online mailing list, Ammar Rashid, a LUMS student who served as editor-in-chief for the blog, and Samad Khurram, an undergraduate at Harvard University who managed the mailing list, led the initiative. Khurram explains that Musharraf's crackdown on news channels during the emergency motivated his and Rashid's work: the blog was conceptualized as a daily newspaper while the mailing list was meant to emulate the one-to-many

distribution model of traditional broadcast mediums. "Providing these were important to us," says Khurram, "since all the private TV channels were banned and the print media faced serious curbs." The choice of a blog and mailing list was further motivated by the fact that these mediums are "simple, reliable, and cost-effective."

Khurram, Rashid, and other SAC members initially experimented with a web-based television channel titled Freedom TV, but dropped the idea owing to time constraints and the lack of resources. The idea of launching an online radio station was also floated, but rejected. Eventually, Khurram and Rashid determined that the combination of a blog and mailing list would be the most effective in terms of disseminating information about the political crisis and organizing community action. While Rashid compiled and edited news, Khurram focused on coordinating and mobilizing different groups that included lawyers, journalists, and politicians in addition to students. This combined use of a blog and mailing list suggests that at the time of the emergency, Pakistanis with internet access were not yet accustomed to the interactive, collaborative, and user-generated culture of the blogosphere. Instead, they were seeking a broadcast alternative to the independent tele-vision channels that had come to dominate the media landscape in recent years.

Initially, the ET blog was limited in scope, catering primarily to the Lahore-based community of student activists. Anti-emergency vigils and protest marches demanding the restoration of the judiciary were documented on the blog through original images, video clips, and first-person testimonies posted by university students.[35] As the SAC movement gained momentum, the blog became the go-to website for information about the campaign, upcoming meetings and protests, and related events such as a lecture series featuring leading activists. Politicians and lawyers hoping to woo, inspire, or advise student activists also used the ET blog as a communications platform. More-over, students who had the opportunity to meet or speak with leaders of the movement for democracy – such as deposed judges, detained lawyers, or opposition politicians – would share notes from their conversations with the SAC community at large through the blog.

Significantly, the ET blog was one of the few resources for original reporting on the government crackdown on student activism. Reports of students being harassed or arrested were regularly posted.[36]

After emergency rule was lifted and Musharraf surrendered his post as chief of army staff, the blog shifted its focus to campaign for the restoration of an independent judiciary. Broadening the ET's mandate in this manner kept it rel-evant and timely in the context of the unfolding political crisis, but resulted in a reduction of original content. Since most students were not directly involved

in what came to be known as the "lawyers' movement" – a campaign to restore the independent judiciary that was in office on November 3 under Chief Justice Chaudhry – the ET blog increasingly featured news articles and opinion pieces from the mainstream print media, both Pakistani and international...

The mailing list, meanwhile, gathered momentum and gained credibility as it expanded to serve the activist community at large, particularly in the context of the lawyers' movement. By March 2008, during Black Flag Week, a week-long protest against the lawyers' deposition, the mailing list reached over 50,000 people. Khurram explains that he initially pushed his e-mails to prominent journalists, columnists, bloggers, newspaper editors, and political party leaders. The list was then forwarded by these 'influentials' to wide networks that were eventually incorporated into the original mailing list.

Thanks to the regularity of updates and its distribution of original content – posts from the ET blog or forwarded correspondence from high-profile lawyers, activists, and politicians – the ET mailing list came to be seen as a credible news source by most of its recipients. In a big moment for alternative news sources, Chief Justice Chaudhry chose to circulate a letter responding to allegations against him by Musharraf's government via the ET mailing list. Indeed, news items and statements originally circulated on the ET list were eventually cited by publications such as The New York Times and The Washington Post. The mailing list's credibility also allowed it to function as a fund-raising resource: "When I made a call for donations for the SAC long march [in June 2008] we were able to raise over USD 1,000 with one email," says Khurram.

Interestingly, both the ET blog and mailing list relied on their audience using SMS text messaging to push their content and community organizing efforts well beyond the limited online audience. For example, the blog coordinated a "mass contact campaign": readers were asked to forward protest messages and campaign demands to politicians via SMS text message. The coveted cellphone numbers of relevant recipients, including top-level politicians, diplomats, and army personnel, were posted to the blog.[37] For his part, when forwarding e-mails with logistical details about protest marches, Khurram would also make sure to circulate SMS text messages containing the same information. "We had a few key people in each segment of the population on an SMS list: a couple of lawyers, a couple of students, a few civil society activists, and some journalists," he explains. "They would then [forward the message] and inform others [in their network]. Text messaging was a primary source of communication and the mailing list was a close second."

Despite its success during the Pakistan Emergency, the ET blog suspended operations on June 25, 2008. In his final post, Rashid indicated a lack of time and resources to maintain the blog. As such, the fate of the ET blog raises

questions about the sustainability of new media platforms beyond times of emergency. Can tools of digital activism also be harnessed as tools of expression? Can young Pakistanis overcome the participation gap and use new media platforms to enact democratic and participatory practices on an everyday basis and not only as tools for community organizing during crises? More importantly, is it necessary for new media platforms to be used in a sustainable way, or is it adequate that developing nations muster 'silent armies' of networked citizen journalists and community organizers who can mobilize during crises?

Citizen Journalism: Redefining Media and Power

December 27, 2007: Benazir Bhutto Assassinated

... In Pakistan, the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007, redefined Pakistani news media as a hybrid product generated by professional and amateur reporters and disseminated via old and new media sources. Bhutto's death shocked and enraged Pakistanis as well as the international community, heightening the sense of political instability across the country. By the time of Bhutto's death, Musharraf had lifted his ban on news channels and the incident received 24-hour news coverage for several days. The assassination was also extensively covered by the international press and broadcast media. In fact, Pakistani FM radio stations, which are legally prevented from broadcasting news, also spread word about Bhutto's death and its fallout with impunity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most Pakistanis were glued to their television screens for information about Bhutto's last moments and the perpetrators of the attack. And yet the assassination marked a turning point in Pakistan's media landscape and ushered in a new era of citizen journalism...

Soon after Bhutto's death had been verified, its cause was contested. Eyewitnesses in Rawalpindi reported hearing gunshots before an explosion. Members of Bhutto's entourage and her colleagues in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) claimed that the leader had been shot. In the immediate wake of the attack, a team of doctors examined her body and stated in a report that she had an open wound on her left temporal region. A day after the assassination, government officials claimed that Bhutto had died when her head hit the lever of the sunroof of her car as she ducked to avoid an assassin's bullets and/or in response to the sound of a blast caused by a suicide bomber. The question of whether Bhutto died of gunshot wounds or a head injury riveted the nation because the truth would have implications on allegations about lax security and government complicity in the assassination.

An important piece of evidence to help settle this debate came in the form of images and an amateur video generated by a PPP supporter at the rally where Bhutto was killed and subsequently circulated by a popular Karachi-based blogger. By making the footage and images available to the mainstream media and public at large, these citizen journalists sparked an accountability movement that eventually forced the Pakistani government to revisit its account of Bhutto's death.

The Teeth Maestro Blog: From Online Diary to Citizen Journalism

The blogger who initially circulated the key images and video clip is Dr. Awab Alvi, a dentist by day who runs a blog called Teeth Maestro. Alvi also contributes and cross-posts to Metroblogging Karachi, an English-language blog maintained by a community of Karachi-based bloggers. Alvi came to blogging early, launching Teeth Maestro in 2004 and signing up as part of the Metroblogging Karachi team in April 2005, soon after the launch of the group blog. Alvi is aware of the trajectory of his blogging career: "It started with me keeping an online diary. Then it became a serious hobby."[38] Since playing a significant role in the coverage of Bhutto's death, Alvi describes himself as a citizen journalist. His posts are regularly featured by Global Voices Online, an international blog aggregator.[39]

...Interestingly, Alvi did not primarily consider blogging as a means to community organizing and political advocacy. For example, when Bhutto was first targeted by a suicide bomb attack that killed 134 people in Karachi on October 18, 2007, Alvi chose not to acknowledge the violence in his posts. "When all these bad incidents were happening," he says, "I thought we should cover Karachi in a positive light and so I went to Flickr and picked up all these inspirational pictures and for several days I just kept a photo blog. I wanted to Karachi to remember its beauty and how it is really a good place."

During the emergency, however, Teeth Maestro – motivated much like The Emergency Times by the media vacuum created by Musharraf – emerged as a go-to blog for information about the students' activist movement. Alvi also proved to be one of the most technologically forward bloggers in Pakistan. He was the first to introduce the SMS2Blog feature for live updates and helped others covering anti-emergency protests install the technology as well. At the time of Bhutto's assassination, Alvi was arguably the most prominent Pakistani blogger and his interests had clearly shifted from cultural observations to political commentary, advocacy, and community organizing. This is evidenced by the fact that on the day of Bhutto's death, he posted four blogs on Teeth Maestro, including live updates via SMS. The next day, he posted 12 times: his own updates from the streets of Karachi and links to important news items and insightful commentary from the global print

media were supplemented by contributions from other bloggers and citizen journalists. For example, he posted an eyewitness report of the violent response across Karachi to Bhutto's death that he received via email.[40]

Hybridity: Citizen Journalists Inform Mainstream Media Coverage

Two days after the assassination, someone contacted Alvi claiming to have obtained images and a video clip that confirmed that Bhutto was shot by an assassin, and therefore did not succumb to a head wound as government officials were suggesting. These images and video footage had been posted by a PPP supporter to his home page on the social networking site Orkut. However, after being inundated with questions and comments about the new evidence, the original source removed the images and clip from Orkut. Luckily, Alvi's contact was able to grab screen shots of those uploaded images before they were taken down.

Alvi then contacted the original source, the PPP supporter, and convinced him to share the images and video. Soon after, Alvi had obtained four images indicating that Bhutto had indeed been shot. However, the video clip proved harder to obtain. The PPP supporter was based in Islamabad and only had access to a dial-up internet connection. Since the video was a 56MB file, he was having trouble uploading and electronically forwarding it to Alvi. At that point, Alvi contacted two employees at Dawn News, an independent, English-language Pakistani news channel, and arranged from them to collect the video from the PPP supporter's house the next morning. The goal, after all, was to make the images and video clip available to the public as soon as possible, whether via the Teeth Maestro blog or a mainstream media broadcast. After a late-night phone call with Alvi, the PPP supporter agreed to share the video clip with the Dawn News team. But the next morning, the original source could not be reached on his cellphone, and the handoff of the video clip did not occur.

In the meantime, by the end of the day on December 29, Alvi had posted the four images he received from the PPP supporter to his blog.[41] Teeth Maestro was thus the first media outlet to circulate images of Bhutto's assassination that could help clarify whether she died of gunshot wounds or a fatal head injury. "The moment I saw these images, I knew I had to get them out publicly as soon as possible," says Alvi. "I quickly edited the posts, published them online on my blog and circulated the link far and wide, letting the dynamics of the free and open internet protect me and the [original] source."

The images were soon cross-posted on other Pakistani blogs, such as The Emergency Times.[42] Alvi also contacted CNN iReport with his story about fresh evidence and forwarded the images to the Dawn News channel. But these mainstream media outlets were slow to pick up on the story. Dawn News first

broadcast the images in the context of an interview with a security analyst at 3 p.m. on December 30...

New Media and Citizenship

February 18, 2008: General election in Pakistan

After Bhutto's assassination, general elections, initially scheduled for January 2008, were postponed until February 18, 2008. It was widely understood that the outcome of the elections would be pivotal for restoring democratic norms in Pakistan. After all, since the official election period began in November 2007, Pakistanis had seen the independent judiciary dismissed and the constitution undermined emergency rule. They had also seen their most popular politician, Bhutto, assassinated. While Pakistanis struggled to imagine who could possibly replace Bhutto – a shoo-in to be elected to her third term as prime minister – they were adamant that the decision be theirs alone, as reflected in a free and fair election.

However, in the run-up to the election it became clear that election rigging and campaign misconduct were rampant. On February 12, the New York-based Human Rights Watch reported that the Pakistani election commission charged with managing polling was under the control of pro-Musharraf officials.[43] Opposition politicians across the country complained that the police and representatives of Musharraf's governing party were harassing them, illegally removing their billboards and banners, and obstructing their campaign rallies. Citizens demonstrating support for any other than the ruling party were either being intimidated by police into changing their vote or bribed.

After being subject to new restrictions during emergency rule, the mainstream media was in no position to expose these dire circumstances. Journalists, particularly those in rural areas, reported that they were being prevented from covering news stories and campaign rallies, threatened with arrest, and regularly having their equipment confiscated. The mainstream broadcast media, meanwhile, was prohibited from covering election rallies and protests and from airing live news broadcasts, live call-in shows, or live talk shows.[44] Moreover, the government kept specific restrictions on election coverage deliberately vague in order to put the onus of caution and restraint on media outlets...

Mailing Lists, Monitors, and Mobilization

In this environment, citizen journalists took it upon themselves to monitor the elections armed with little more than camera phones. According to The Wall Street Journal, the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), an independent

coalition of non-governmental organizations, enlisted over 20,000 civilians to observe polling stations and pre-election campaigning in more than 250 election zones. Such recruitment was unprecedented in FAFEN's history. Speaking to The Wall Street Journal, Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, the executive director of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, another election monitoring group, said, "Never before has there been such large-scale mobilization for a Pakistani election... The role civil society is playing has been a real positive"[45]...

Mailing lists became the main form of communication between activists and Pakistanis in the days before the election. Samad Khurram, the manager of The Emergency Times mailing list, which at the time of the election boasted over 50,000 recipients, explained that mailing lists had particular appeal because content circulated remained among existing networks of trust. Since the goal was to organize the surreptitious monitoring of the polls by civilians, Khurram pointed out, it would make little sense to use a more open and accessible media platform such as YouTube or a blog. Activists learned the hard way during emergency rule that pro-Musharraf officials and security personnel would monitor new media content, particularly Flickr images and YouTube video clips, to identify and arrest protestors and democracy advocates. Relying on similar platforms during the election would have made volunteer monitors targets for harassment by election commission delegates and police officers...

It is important to note that activist groups did not rely on mailing lists alone to mobilize Pakistanis on election day. Each email included a cellphone number that volunteers could contact via SMS text messages with questions and to indicate the specific timeslots during which they were available to monitor polling. In most cases, emails included short messages that were meant to be copied and further circulated via SMS text message. The parallel use of SMS text messages allowed activists to reach a wider audience while continuing to keep information about their monitoring activities restricted to trusted recipients.

On the day after the election, activist groups and volunteer monitors used the mailing lists to distribute their observations from the polling booths. First-hand accounts of election rigging at specific polling stations were widely circulated by civilian monitors. For example, on February 19, Ahmed Mustafa, a student at the Sindh Muslim Law College in Karachi sent out the following email with the subject "100% rigging at polling station NA250 and NA24":

> I was ... on my field visits [at] polling station of SM Law College NA250. Presiding officer stamped 400 fake ballot papers in favor of [political party] MQM in front of our team.... When we approached NA 242 in Federal B. Area, people said that when they entered the polling booth

> to cast votes, a person with a badge of the MQM blocked everyone and
> snatched [their] ballot papers.

Mainstream media journalists and non-governmental organizations such as
Human Rights Watch used such brief emails to evaluate the prevalence of
election rigging.

Live Blogging the Vote

Although mailing lists were the preferred form of communication on election
day, bloggers remained active in providing election coverage. In the run-up to
voting, bloggers were regularly posting links to news reports about election
rigging, voter intimidation, recommendations from international monitoring
committees, and articles from the international print media analyzing the
importance of the February 2008 elections. For example, on February 16, The
Emergency Times blog ran a transcript of a phone call in which Pakistan's
attorney general admits that the upcoming elections will be "massively
rigged." The post included an audio clip of the phone conversation as well as
background information about the attorney general and his political biases.[46]

Meanwhile, NaiTazi – with its slogan "Pakistani news. Powered by You!" –
emerged as a leading source of information during election week. The blog
featured comments by prominent journalists and news anchors against the
government's restrictions on the media.[47] It also posted helpful analyses of
previous elections and voting trends to orient young voters, who in many
cases were heading to the polls for the first time in this historic election.
For example, a post titled "Karachi: MQM sets yes on 18 out of 20 [National
Assembly] seats from Karachi", uploaded on February 15, documented the
electoral success of a prominent, Karachi-based political party, the Muttahida
Qaumi Movement (MQM). The post included details about the party's
campaign tactics, popularity level by location, and past performance when in
office.[48]

On election day, bloggers were providing updates about polling results as
they came in through the mainstream media, particularly independent news
channels. The Teeth Maestro blog, for example, posted an update about which
political parties were leading in the polls and included a summary about each
party's stance with regards to seminal issues such as the restoration of the
judiciary.[49]

More importantly, many young voters turned to popular blogs to post
descriptions of their polling experience and, often, expose election rigging.
For example, midway through election day, a student at the PECHS Girls
College in Karachi documented explicit rigging at the NA251 polling station on
the Teeth Maestro blog.[50] Her account described several irregularities in the

way polling was being conducted as well as a ballot-stuffing incident. The post generated several responses that either discounted claims of election rigging at the same polling station or described similar election rigging efforts at polling stations in the jurisdictions of rival political parties.

YouTube and SMS Text Messaging: Motivating Civic Action

In addition to blogs, YouTube was used in innovative ways to mobilize Pakistanis. Since calls for civilian election monitoring could not be broadcast online, leading activists uploaded inspirational messages and mission statements to inspire action. For example, Aitzaz Ahsan, the head of the Pakistan Bar Association and leader of the movement for the restoration of an independent judiciary, posted a series of original poems, recited by himself, to YouTube. One poem, titled "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" and posted on February 14, traced the history of Pakistan's democratic aspirations and civil society movements against the army and other forms of oppression.[51]

Mediated civic engagement was not restricted to activists, citizen journalists, and civilian monitors alone. On election day, average voters used SMS text messages to urge their friends, family, and colleagues to vote. One SMS that was widely circulated on the morning of the elections read: "With the elections, lets all light a flame of hope, that we will not let Pakistan be destroyed by people who are not part of us." Moreover, SMS text messages were used to counter widespread fear that there would be violence and bomb blasts at polling stations. For example, confident after casting her vote that there was no security threat at her appointed polling station, Tabassum Saigol, a Karachi-based voter, text messaged everyone in her cellphone directory. She assured them that the streets were safe, the polling stations well-guarded, and the voting process straightforward and efficient.

Sadly, despite such efforts, the 44.5 percent voter turnout remained lower than the 45% registered during the previous general elections in 2002. The use of new mobilizing tools was offset by a greater fear of violence. But there was a significant civic media success story: the civilian monitoring efforts proved that new media platforms could be used efficiently to coordinate civic action by specific communities.

Civilians with Camera Phones

February 21, 2008: Rigging during 2008 General Elections Exposed

On February 21, a civilian monitor posted a video documenting blatant election rigging to YouTube. The clip shows a woman in charge of conducting polling at the NA250 station in Karachi marking several ballots in favor of the

MQM political party with her thumbprint (owing to low literacy rates, this is a common way of casting a vote). The angle from which the video is shot, its quality, and duration indicate that the civilian monitor used a concealed camera phone to capture the incriminating footage.[52]

By February 22, the link to the YouTube clip was distributed via the mailing lists that had been established in the run-up to the election and posted to a handful of blogs. But the same day, users began to complain that they could not access the YouTube domain. Blogs such as PKPolitics[53] and Adnan's Crazy Blogging World[54] reported that YouTube had been banned in Pakistan. These reports prompted a range of responses from internet users nationwide: some claimed that they could still access the video-sharing site, others were convinced that the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) had in fact banned YouTube. Eventually, it was determined by several bloggers that users relying on internet service providers that utilized the infrastructure – primarily phone lines – of the government-run Pakistan Telecommunications Limited (PTCL) were being prevented from loading the YouTube domain.

Since the Pakistani government had not officially announced a ban on the video-sharing site, bloggers began to speculate as to why access to YouTube was being limited. Adnan Siddiqi – who maintains Adnan's Crazy Blogging World – wrote:

> I ... don't know what's the actual reason [for the YouTube ban] but ... [people] say that there were some videos published on YouTube which were singing praises of free and fair election in Pakistan.[55]

...Pakistanis posting to online chat forums such as Shiachat also linked the government's attempt to block YouTube to the clips documenting election rigging.[56] Indeed, news of the government's attempts to suppress evidence of election rigging sparked a vibrant conversation throughout the Pakistani online community about the transparency of the 2008 elections, the frequency of polling violations, and the significance of rigging. The political party whose officials can be seen improperly marking ballots in the video was also maligned.

On February 23, the Pakistani government officially blocked access to the YouTube domain, claiming that the popular website hosted blasphemous content. No mention of the election rigging videos was made in the announcement... The BBC reported that the PTA had instructed Pakistani internet service providers to block the site because it featured the con-troversial Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad as well as a trailer for a Dutch film that negatively portrays Islam...[57]

It is interesting to note that if the government had not blocked YouTube, the election rigging video would only have been viewed by activists, students,

and volunteer monitors who subscribed to mailing lists. The YouTube block, however, created a buzz in the blogosphere and curiosity about the government's motivations, thereby attracting more attention to the election rigging clip and ensuring its broad circulation.

The incident also prompted an interesting collaboration between old and new media. Soon after reports about the YouTube ban surfaced online on February 22, the leading independent news station Geo TV broadcast the original video uploaded by the civilian monitor. However, as it became increasingly clear that the government was making an effort to suppress the video, the news channel, which had already been banned during the 2007 emergency, ceased broadcasting the clip.

Instead, the channel took a cue from the clip's content and, emboldened by the online response to the YouTube video, began broadcasting other footage that revealed irregularities at polling stations. Although Geo TV reporters had captured this footage on election day, February 18, they did not compile and broadcast it as an investigative report focusing on election rigging until February 22, the day the YouTube video was being circulated online.[58] The channel made sure to include any footage captured on hidden cameras in an effort to mimic the tactics of citizen journalists and civilian monitors who mobilized for the election.

Interestingly, some of the early viewer comments about the election rigging clip posted to YouTube betray skepticism about the video's authenticity, with one viewer asking why Geo TV has not broadcast the clip if it is genuine. This response shows that the primary trust of the public remained with mainstream media outlets, rather than citizen journalists, even at a time when new media tools were in wide deployment. While it cannot be explicitly documented, the fact that Geo TV did eventually broadcast the YouTube clip must have boosted the perceived credibility of citizen journalism. More importantly, the fact that Geo TV shifted the focus of its programming to accord with a civic media artifact indicates that the Pakistani media landscape is moving towards a hybrid model, where professional journalists take the work of citizen journalists seriously, while citizen media relies on the mainstream media for dissemination and legitimacy...

On February 24, the Pakistani government's attempts to block YouTube led to a worldwide shutdown of the website for several hours... [A] guest blogger on the Teeth Maestro website wrote:

> It seems illogical for the government of Pakistan to hinder their own people from using one very important tool of the modern era. Pakistan Internet Exchange is also advised to upgrade its filtering/censorship systems which can cater to URL-specific blocks and not take the entire country down a roller coaster of censorship.[59]

Owing to the global ramifications of the YouTube block, the Pakistani govern-
ment was forced to lift the ban on February 27. Clips showing election rigging
– those posted by the civilian monitor as well as subsequent broadcasts from
independent news channels – continue to be available on the website.

Pakistani vs. Western New Media Use

In this paper, we have seen how new media platforms and digital technologies
have been harnessed by citizen journalists and democracy advocates for
hyperlocal reporting and community organizing. We have also seen how main-
stream media outlets increasingly serve as distribution channels for citizen
journalism, initially generated and circulated via blogs, YouTube, or SMS text
messages. Within certain communities, then, the adoption of new media plat-
forms in Pakistan resembles their use in developed democracies such as the
United States.

There are, however, differences between Pakistani and western approaches to
new media. In the developed world, new media platforms gained popularity
as many-to-many communications tools that reoriented the public as media
producers and participants in a conversation rather than passive consumers
within the one-to-many broadcast model.

In Pakistan, however, access to information – rather than the desire to par-
ticipate – has driven the adoption of new media platforms. When old media
distribution channels were compromised, new media was harnessed to fill in
the gaps and maintain a flow of news and information. As such, new media in
Pakistan has helped old media survive. The result is a media amalgamation in
which information is pushed to the public, promiscuously distributed across
broadcast media, new media platforms, and various digital technologies to
prevent being disrupted or corrupted by the authorities. Thanks to amateurs
and activists, students and concerned civilians, a nugget of information can
leap from local televised news broadcasts to YouTube to SMS text message to
FM radio broadcasts to blog posts to international news reports – whatever it
takes to go public.

It would be a mistake to conclude this paper with the impression that digital
technologies and new media platforms are the exclusive preserve of educated
and privileged activists and citizen journalists, used solely for information
dissemination and community organizing. Indeed, some of the best uses
of new media and digital technologies address highly localized issues and
are emergent, ad hoc, and culturally specific. For example, the residents of
Karachi occasionally create an ad hoc, networked public sphere using FM radio
broadcasts, cellphones, and landline connections not only to negotiate urban
violence, as they did during the Emergency, but also to navigate flash floods

during the monsoon, negotiate bad traffic owing to construction, and monitor protest rallies through the city.

Endnotes

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2   Benkler, Yochai. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press. P. 213.

3   The paper describes the use of digital technologies and new media platforms in Pakistan between March 2007 and February 2008, a period colloquially referred to as the 'Pakistan Emergency'. In this time, the military ruler General Musharraf dismissed the Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, thereby undermining the country's independent judiciary. Taking advantage of a weakened judiciary, General Musharraf continued to serve simultaneously as the country's president and chief of army staff, thus blurring the distinction between democracy and dictatorship. Between November 2007 and February 2008, Pakistanis learnt just how rocky the road to democratic rule can be: in that time, General Musharraf imposed a state of emergency and suspended the constitution, opposition parties called for elections, a popular politician – former prime minister Benazir Bhutto – was brutally assassinated, and general elections were held. Moreover, press freedom was drastically curtailed during this time – amendments promulgated by General Musharraf in the summer of 2007 made it impossible for the media to report on elections or investigate matters relating to the government or Pakistan Army.

4   Certain digital technologies and new media platforms such as wikis (server programs that allow users to collaborate in forming the content of a website) and Twitter are not described in this paper because they have yet to gain popularity in Pakistan owing to limited internet access, low literacy rates, and the non-availability of web content in the national Urdu language.

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      operators (Paktel, Ufone, and Mobilink) were present in Pakistan. However, exorbitant
      connection fees, airtime charges, and billing on incoming calls kept mobile penetration
      at 0.2 percent until the end of the decade. The Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) – a
      government agency founded in 1997 to regulate the telecom industry – introduced a
      calling party pays (CPP) policy in 2001, which resulted in industry competition that helped
      increase mobile penetration to 5.28 percent in 2004. The introduction of two new telecom
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      handsets. By July 2006, overall teledensity in Pakistan stood at 46.9 percent, of which only
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      pk/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=1033. According to the PTA, the total
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      line and children under the age of 8 – is about 97 million people. In other words, over
      60 percent of the potential Pakistani market was using cellphones when Musharraf sus-
      pended the constitution. Since 2003, telecom companies have invested over US$ 8 billion
      in Pakistan, with the mobile sector accounting for 73 percent of that expenditure. In
      the 2007 fiscal year alone, the mobile sector invested USD 2.7 billion. And the market is
      expected to grow: China Mobile has acquired one cellular network and contracted USD
      500 million to companies such as Ericcson, ZTE, and Alcatel to roll out new networks.
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Annotation

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After reading Huma Yusuf's paper, "Old and New Media: Converging during the Pakistan Emergency (March 2007-2008)," what strikes the reader primarily is that the piece is rather dated. It is important to understand that the piece is set in 2007, when the tech-media landscape was different from the present. And it is funny that I use the word 'dated' to describe something that happened only about seven years ago. 2007 represents a time when blogs and email lists were used as a major channel of communication. Things are not the same now!

Events like the Arab Spring, the Shahbag protests at Bangladesh, and the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement in India are evidence of the fact that activism by citizens looks very different now, especially with Twitter and Facebook playing a major role of mobilisation and information dissemination. Messaging services like Whatsapp are playing an important role as well. For instance, in 2012, people moved to Whatsapp en masse when the state of Karnataka in India, in a bid to counter rumour mongering, imposed a ban on telecom operators on sending text messages in bulk.

However, what hasn't changed for quite a significant amount of the population in South Asia is the issue of access to the Internet. While India is home to one of the largest populations/numbers of mobile phone owners in the world, it's only a relatively small group that owns smartphones. While the number of smartphone owners is on a rise, the majority still owns feature phones.

Radio is still the most easily accessible medium for the masses in the Indian sub-continent. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most regulated media. In India, news is banned on private radio channels. News is played only on the government-run All India Radio. Huma Yusuf beautifully demonstrates how, in the face of a news ban, radio stations used innovative ways of subversion to get news of their loved ones stuck in different parts of the city of Karachi with the active participation of Karachi residents. The ban on news on radio has also given rise to newer mediums like mobile radio in India. Jharkhand Mobile Vaani and CGNet Swara are some notable

examples. It is also useful to note that mobile radio does not come under any government regulation in India.

Reading this piece gives a fascinating insight into the development of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is a common phenomenon today. The popularity of social media and democratisation of media tools (which only media professionals had access to earlier) are some of the reasons for the popularity of citizen journalism all over the world. However, reading this paper brought some questions to the fore. Did the idea of citizen journalism flourish only in the face of a ban on mainstream media? Did it flourish only in the face of suppression and crisis? Answers to these questions will give rise to interesting insights on the emergence of citizen journalism in your community, your city, or your country.

Also, news media in the past followed the broadcast model, i.e., it relayed the news, and the readers consumed it. Apart from letters to the editor, there wasn't any other way for the general public to communicate back. With the advent of digital tools, what has crucially changed is the interactive element of media, where the consumer of the media is also an active participant. While traditional forms of media (radio, newspapers) are still thriving especially in the Indian subcontinent, they have incorporated the interactive element in various ways. News gathering and news consumption cannot be the same as it was in the past.

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