

The Power of Digital Narratives: Analyzing Facebook's Role in Inspiring and Sustaining the Galle Face Protest Sri Lanka 2022

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8120303>

Received: 14 December 2024; Accepted: 18 December 2024; Published: 20 January 2025

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2022, the protest that took place in the center of the Galleface protest area was a remarkable event in the history of Sri Lanka. The reason for this is that until then, no protest had taken place in the history of this country with the representation of the people of the entire society. Before the start of the 2022 Galleface protest, protests against the existing government had started in various places on the island. The series of protests started from the silent protest centered around Vihara Maha Devi Park to the Galleface ground.

The massive crisis faced by the people when the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka approved daily power cuts due to the fuel crisis was a special reason for the protest (Dahanayake, 2022). Then this crisis was felt by the public because there was not enough fuel in the country for the public and there were not enough dollars in the country to import. Accordingly, the public spent days in queues, disrupting their daily activities and standing in long queues to get fuel. The fact that queues of vehicles have been created in front of fuel stations all over the island to get fuel (Dahanayake, 2022) have prepared the reasons for directing people to protest.

The protesters have continued the protest by using social media, which is a leading tool for protests in the age of social media. This protest arose due to the impact of the economic crisis, the covid epidemic and many other factors that have been discussed in the society for a long time.

Social media has assumed the dominant media role in the wave of protests (Polkotuwa, 2022)

Socialization of ideologies and gathering of people often took place through social media including Facebook. A broad public discourse on slogans, political crises, public gatherings etc. was started through social media. As Senanayake and Edirisinghe (2022) point out, new political concepts have been introduced into the public dialogue, providing a substitute and a complement to an illiberal democracy. There, social media has prepared a digital platform for the people of a country for their right to information, right to speech and expression, right to peaceful assembly, etc. As a result of the post-Galleface protest, today the public has realized that the politician is a representative of the people, that he is appointed to power by the people and that he is removed from power by the people. The role played by Facebook media as a citizen media should be studied to provide that political reading to the public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A public protest is a gathering of people to express their opinion about an event in society (Bailey, 1969). A public protest can have various aims and objectives. Public protests are often used to influence public opinion, present information about any socially perceived injustice, and draw attention to it. Social media seems to have carved out a prominent role in recent protests. Accordingly, social media has prepared a digital platform for the people of a country for their right to information, right to speech and expression, right to peaceful assembly, etc. Especially in times of crisis, social media has a great place as a strategic communication medium that can be easily used by the people of the society.

Twelve options for crisis communication have been identified after the International Crisis State Summit held

in June 2012 (International Risk Governance Council, 2012). Social media has been identified as the most appropriate medium to use for those risky situations and crisis communications. It has been explained that social media can also be used for crisis causes, prevailing conditions, crisis victims and alternative communication. (Wendlin, Radich and Jacobson, 2013)

According to that, social media can be identified as the most suitable media to communicate the crisis situations of a country in the society. It follows that if social media is the most suitable medium to communicate a crisis, then it should be prepared before communicating through it.

Because if anything can be communicated, false information, hateful information as well as misguided information can be communicated. In general, the youth community is more inclined to make social transformations. It is compared to the older and younger generations in the society. They have got a suitable and motivating opportunity through social media through digital technology. Looking at the end of the last decade, numerically large social transformations have taken place all over the world. Arab Spring, Wall Street Protest - United Kingdom and United States, Indigenados Revolution in Spain, Revolution of 132 in Mexico, Hong Kong and the revolution in South Korea can be cited as examples (Grosvenorla, 2022). The protest started by the youth community in the United States in the year 2011 under the title of Occupy Wall Street was the rise of the people affected by the economic conditions due to the country's political agenda.

There, the youth community has come together through social media. The existence of these revolutions has been confirmed by the work done by social media in all these revolutions. Social media empowered youth for information dissemination, self-organization and mobilization. Likewise, some people use social media to promote their political views and socialize their emotional feelings (Dokuka and Gradoselskaya, 2014).

For example, it is said that 40% of the participants in the Ukrainian protest in 2014 joined because of encouragement from relatives through Facebook (Onach, 2014). It is a phenomenon that should be mentioned here that they are messages that came on the basis of their personal relationships. It is clear that social media has led to the creation of groups of people based on common interests. Often, rather than communicating message effective to the people, they are only trying to achieve their political goals and create a positive image of their profiles (Gladwell, 2010). It has been found that individuals who engage in social media and digital media play some form of role in political communication. Their role in creating political participation is strong.

The news, expression and community empowerment needed to handle citizen protests can be done through social media (Valenzulala, 2013). It has been confirmed by research conducted in connection with the series of protests held in Chile in 2011. The constant use of social media provides some impetus for the formation of civil protests and mass mobilization. It is said that the level of education and social level of the civil groups also causes these protests to spread. It has been recognized that although not all those involved in social protests are regular users of social media, protest activists are often regular users of social media. Accordingly, it can be understood that social media has helped in leading protests effectively. But it is also recognized that social media is not the most sophisticated means available for organizing and implementing protests. It further states that civil protests can be successful if a technical platform is prepared so that everyone in the society can organize equally. Because there is a lot of room for political activists to prepare themselves through social media to dissolve the protests that are formed through social media (Bunyan, 2019). Therefore, it is possible to build a correct social system by working to carry out positive communication for the protest to work in a correct direction.

In the study of contextual crises, the most popular social media and online crisis is associated with the Arab Spring. A protest was created in Tunisia in 2010 based on an injustice that happened to a street vendor named Mohamed Bousisi who lived in Tunisia. The main reason for that was the system of governance in Arab countries at that time. The main reason was disagreement. People rallied through social media due to the contextual crisis caused by the unfair, unjust nature of the regime. The people who rose up against the regime in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Morocco, etc. were organized and communicated through social media. Activating social people and building their participation was also done through social media. (Merrell, 2017) social media was used by democracy fighters as the main means of communication especially to communicate their ideas to others. In this way, social media has become essential for people to gather together during civil interventions in the Middle East and North American countries (Mahmudla, 2017). Because the people involved with it are heavily

involved with social media. It also provides opportunities for users to join the political process collectively.

In general, mass media in a country should fulfill a great responsibility in social reformation. However, it is rare to see mass media in Sri Lanka trying to implement their political interests based on the corporate political agenda, unless they try to do social political development.

“It goes without saying that the electronic media is in a very flourishing state as well as the printed media in the country today. The important thing is that more power belongs to the private sector. There are two main forms in the way mass media behave in the private sector. One of them is to serve a political agenda of their choice. One of them is to serve a political camp of their choice. The other form is to act in a manner related to the survival and security of businesses' (Vijesuriya, 2022, p.37).”

It also seems that people are more involved in civic activities due to the fact that social media users are able to communicate without being influenced by social media due to the absence of the gatekeeping process that is usually present in mass media. On the other hand, mass media should provide a positive level of support for civil uprisings, but if not, they turn to alternative media.

'Civil society movements need the support of mass media to work. Civil society organizations do not have media outlets. In fact, the media has no power. It is the owners of the media organizations who decide whether or not to bring the views of the civil society to the society. 37). They reach decisions based on how much the ideologies of civil society help their agenda' (Wijesuriya, 2022, page 37).

This also enables the formation of collective identity. Looking at the social movement literature, one can recognize the importance of collective identity for social movements. (Melucci, 1995). Collective identity is defined as a group derived from the common experiences, interests, etc. of its members. (Tyler and Witter, 1992). Some have also stated that it is not the main central factor in starting the protest activities. (Bent and Segerberg, 2012) However, what is more important than asking how much collective identity matters is that collective identity is operationalized in new ways. For example, things like hashtag revolutions provide an opportunity not only for that society but also for people who agree with that fact all over the world to connect with the revolution. In cases where the authorities are not sensitive to the people, people post their protests through social media. Social media activism brings together and provides perspectives on many issues that are traditionally out of reach (Leela, 2020).

Social media is a perfect haven for certain situations where you cannot express your views directly in a public address or in general. There are many reasons such as hiding one's identity, the ability to share any information on social media, the rapid circulation of information, and being a medium that is easily accessible to the general public. The reason for this is the ability to communicate ideas that can only be circulated among acquaintances, and around a field of receivers who cannot tell who is reading their message. These are provided with different perspectives based on the opinions of authentic scholars belonging to each field. In general, the mainstream media rarely encourages the people, creates opportunities for the creation of viewpoints, etc. Because they operate through a corporate political agenda. Social media has no agenda. It has no owner. Therefore the information is not controlled or verified. In the early days, public appeals for political stand-ups were rarely made through social media.

Often, they are only associated with simple phenomena such as obtaining online signatures. Apart from raising awareness about political content, asking their likes and dislikes, etc., there has been no organization through social media for a big social transformation (Leela, 2020). Accordingly, it is clear that in the early period, there was no involvement in social reformation through social media. On 11-13-2013, in response to the Facebook message to gather in the capital of Ukraine, about 1500 people came on the first day and by three days it had increased to 100,000. The most used social media in Ukraine were Twitter and Facebook. They were able to quickly spread information related to the cause they started all over Ukraine. An online TV channel was also started to communicate the protest. The channel was run by a group of journalists who left the media due to censorship (Rupasinghe, 2022). Accordingly, social media has made a great intervention in the creation of struggles in the world in the age of social media, and by that the people's objections related to the government mechanism have been socialized and the public has been motivated for the protest.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach here is deductive research approach. There, by studying previous literary sources, based on previous research and established knowledge principles, interpretivism was theoretically taught. Case study was used as the research strategy of this research. This research was conducted using social media activists and public opinion leaders who were involved in the initiation and dissemination of the Galleface protest as data contributors. The data collection process was done through semi-structured interviews and observations.

Qualitative research methodology was used as research methodology in this research. According to that, how the journalism carried out through Facebook media was peculiar to the citizens was studied through citizen journalism. Accordingly, qualitative data was obtained and how Facebook media was used to communicate the protest was identified through the interviews conducted with the protesters. Apart from that, the newspaper reports, books, research articles etc. written about the protest were studied and the campaigns made by the protesters through Facebook media during the protest period were also widely observed.

The data required for the research was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with them under the qualitative research method used in this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the data contributors based on the pre-arranged interview guide. Accordingly, a sample of 15 people was selected representing the population and thus the phenomenon and context related to the research problem were studied extensively. There, through purposive sampling and snowball sampling, the social media activists and public opinion leaders were contacted for interviews as data contributors. I arranged the data obtained chronologically and removed the repetitions and filed the data properly. NVivo software was used for that.

FINDINGS

Using Facebook for motivation

The people's participation in the Galleface protest that started on April 3 started from April 9, 2022. Until then, only a very few people joined the Galleface ground. The social media process that brought massive citizen power to the Galleface protest ground on April 9 is remarkable. Because at that time, apart from Sirasa Media Network and Siyatha Media Network, no media channel saw this as a people's protest. Those media reported the activity at the Galleface as a beach party. In such a situation, the leaders of the protest have primarily used the Facebook media for the difficult task of bringing the Sri Lankan people to one place. The reason was that Facebook was the most popular social media used by most people in Sri Lanka at that time.

Facebook is the media used by the largest population of Sri Lanka as their social media (OOSGA 2023).

According to the Data Report website (2022), the number of social media users in Sri Lanka is 8.20 million by January 2022. Facebook is the most popular social media among the people of Sri Lanka at this time. That's why Facebook has become a great force to protest. We did this because of social media, Facebook being the main one. Otherwise, we cannot collect people by writing an article in the newspaper. To be precise, this is a protest through social media (4 the protester, 2023.03.09, private discussion). Accordingly, they carried out the task of bringing the people to Colombo on April 9 in several ways.

Posting short but motivating Facebook content

Digital designers were primarily used to communicate motivationally why Sri Lankan citizens should come to Colombo on April 9. Until then, they created for the work that was done by paying money for free and started to stand up for their civic responsibility. Accordingly, digital content writers engaged in motivational content writing.

We mainly used social media to manipulate our ideology during the protest. For example, there were slogans in the society saying Gotabhaya must go. Our slogan was "Throw out the government and overthrow the system". Four words and this is the slogan we used. (15 the protester, 2023.03.18, private discussion).

Accordingly, the following challenging short phrases have been used. It is a fact that the protesters have focused

on the use of such a short phrase in other protests of the world. In the Egyptian protest, the short statement 'we are all Sahid' (Mahla, 2011) has led to a drastic transformation in the political sphere in the country. "April 9 to Colombo, one million to Colombo, Come, let's gather the whole country in one place, Let us see a victorious end to the protest, April 9 at 9 am, Young power to Colombo, We are going to Colombo on April 9, and 9. Come on man" Short phrases such as etc. have been prepared.

"Give the stolen money." We took it as a slogan. It told many untold stories. The government and the respective parties have stolen the money of our innocent people (11 the protester, 2023.03.19, private discussion).

"There is no mechanism to give it back. That's why there were talks like our country is in an economic recession right now. But we only used those two or three words. Because nowadays people don't have the mentality to read and read. It is the statements that we published on the Facebook media that we understand when we see it (12 the protester, 2023.03.19, private discussion).

The use of short themes has become more appropriate to communicate the message of the protest clearly and concisely. These slogans have been used to build manpower and generate the necessary energy for the protest.

Facebook content has been created to target the youth community

Among the social media users in Sri Lanka, Facebook is used mostly by the youth community. Therefore, digital designers have worked to create content aimed at them.

'As far as I can tell, if you take people younger than us, many of them were of a blood-thirsty nature. That's how the younger generation uses social media. That's why we named it "The Protest of Love."' (14 the protester, 2023.03.08, private discussion).

The youth community was also targeted in the Facebook media campaign organized to bring Gotabaya Rajapaksa to power in 2020. They saw that it is the youth community that brings Gotabhaya to power and the choice of the youth is Gotabhaya. Therefore, there were Facebook posts that ironically communicated that the youth should join in removing Gotabhaya Rajapaksa from his position. Campaigns were carried out through Facebook to bring Gotabhaya Rajapaksa to power and paid unlimited amounts of money. However, motivated by this, the young people trusted Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and made him the leader of the people. In that way, the target audience of the free Facebook content of the people's protest built to oust Gotabhaya Rajapaksa from his position was the youth community.

"Because of the importance of Facebook People carrying out propaganda have come to Facebook to catch the youth" (1 st protester, 2023.04.04, private discussion).

Young power to Colombo, Come on man, We are the last generation whose dreams will die, We are the first generation to win dreams, Let us change, let's change the next generation, The new generation is changing that , The love protest of youth , We are the new generation to right the wrongs of history, Creative slogans etc. were aimed at the youth community. According to the data contributors, they were deceived by the false promises of the politicians and used their valuable votes to communicate that the youth community is a group of courageous fighters and wise men than the older generation and that only the youth community can change this system.

Naming the communication through Facebook as the "Protest of Love"

The Galleface protest was organized in a different way than the previous Sri Lankan protests. They are concerned with organizing in a completely different way than a radical militant nature. So this protest came to be known as the "Protest of Love". Rather than carrying out loud demonstrations and carrying out the protest, the protesters have often worked to maintain the protest in a creative manner. Specially they have worked to organize the protest through an environment-friendly and environmental protection program, and have communicated the importance of engaging in the protest while protecting the environment.

In addition, people who love the environment were with me. During the protest, I used my Facebook to talk about the damage done by politicians to the environment. I have shown them in my facebook videos with

evidence.' (04th protester, 2023.03.09, private discussion).

The legal camp at the Galleface ground has also been very supportive of the legal status of obtaining and publishing accurate data. The activists who understood that no matter how much they talk about environmental protection, the land they are fighting for is being destroyed by garbage and plastic, and have organized a creative program for that. Accordingly, a large design has been made on the netted gate of the protest ground using the bottles that were discarded in the protest ground. It is to create "Go Home Gota" from the bottles.

As those who have studied architecture, we have a sense that after taking the value of a town or a village, if it is destroyed at that time, it becomes more of a crime. Therefore, we started the bottle creation with an idea of wanting to be careful there. A person who has seen the direct can see that "This goat go home is what is taken". But in that direct message, we really wanted to give the message to the society that the Galleface is a beautiful place and we need to protect it. (14 the protester, 2023.03.08, private discussion).

Accordingly, the land architects who were involved in the protest in the Galleface protest area, and the undergraduate students of the University of Moratuwa, who are studying the graduate courses in landscape architecting, have worked primarily for this purpose.

"What we have learned is architecture while studying it, what we realized is that we can get a lot of work from the people of our country, We saw a lot of bottles left on the ground, Then we talked about how to make people understand that within this protest, we should do this in a peaceful way, something that will not harm the environment or people., We had a group of people who had been together since the beginning. We talked about what to do and what should do here and talked about the damage that can be caused here, after thinking and talking like that, we created the design made of bottles at the Galleface. We put them in the Page of "Protest of Love", After that, it became viral that the Moratuwa crew was doing this kind of work. Really, we used Facebook during our protest." (14 the protester, 2023.03.08, private discussion).

From the moment it was prepared, it was broadcasted live on Facebook and at the end of the creation, its videos and photos were posted on the "Protest of Love" Facebook Page. According to the design that started from it, such designs have been created in the land of protest. A great motivation for that was done by Facebook media. This allowed to create enthusiasm among the protestors and encouraged them to participate more actively in the protest.

Use of color for Facebook content

It was clear from the comments of the data contributors how the protesters have worked to maintain the face of the protest through the colors used for the Galleface protest. They have been especially careful about the colors used physically as well as the color matching used for social media campaigns. Accordingly, it was recognized that they mostly used black color.

"We used black color to keep the common shape of the Protest." (15 the protester, 2023.03.18, private discussion).

The color white, which is not usually used in a protest, has also been used more.

"White color was used; white is the color that is not usually used in a protest. At that time, people were shot and killed in different parts of the country. We unequivocally stated that it needs justice." (15 the protester, 2023.03.18, private discussion).

In addition, green color and brown color have been used. Red, which is mostly used in protest, has been used very minimally in expressions of protest.

Usually, a left-wing political party or a radical group usually uses the color red. It is the same in the world and it is the same in our country." (12 the protester, 2023.03.18, private discussion).

People in our country are a bit allergic to red, which means that when they see red, they imagine that get a T-56

and get shot in the head. Actually, when we take the colors used in the Galleface, red is the least used color, you can see them from the posters that we have shared on Facebook (15 the protester, 2023.03.18, private discussion).

The Inter-University Students' Union only uses red and black colors for Facebook content created using its name, but they have also taken care to minimize the use of red in their generally anonymous Facebook posts.

We also did various activities in our nature. We fought our way. Apart from that, the most important thing for us was to keep the general shape here (12 th protester, 2023.03.19, private discussion).

We did such things to protect it. As an independent union, we carried out the rolled over the roadblocks and fought and shouted. But that's how we connected in general. We shared them in Facebook. Then it is easy to go among the people. This is not the way they have always seen the Inter University students' union (12 th protester, 2023.03.19, private discussion).

Using music for Facebook publicity

According to the data contributors, the activists organized the protests in various ways. Curfew has often been imposed on those areas or the entire island on the days when the protesters organized protests. Therefore, many people who were hoping to come Galleface ground from far away areas did not get the opportunity to join it. Realizing that, the protesters used different methods in organizing their protests. One of them is to send famous artists to the surrounding areas of Colombo and organize protest marches from each place.

“For example, one of the Artists’ houses is near Nugegoda (populated suburb of Colombo). So, we tell him to please go with his friend and bring the people near Wijerama area (A small residential area near to the Jayewardenepura University) Then even when the curfew is imposed, the two of them go to Wijerama. Almost near the Jayewardenepura University.”

“He went there, played a guitar and started to singing. Hearing that sound, the students of the University came out and joined them. We have informed the students of the University about it through Facebook groups and WhatsApp groups through the Inter University Union.”

“Then they go and gather there. Then the people of the village also join in little by little. When enough people gather, they leaved there and came along the road to the protest ground with that crowd.”

“At that time, more and more people gathered in the middle of the road, those who wanted to go to the protest ground but could not go down the road alone.” (12 the protester, 2023.03.18, private discussion).

They are engaged in singing songs as usual until the crowd gathers, and when they gradually reach the protest ground, they chant slogans and gave it a protest face. Music has been used as a powerful motivational tool in the protest. Attempts have been made to create lively and energetic atmospheres in the protest by using simple musical instruments like guitars and drums. This process has been very helpful in engaging the public in the protest as well as retaining the activists throughout the protest.

The designers who were involved in the protest have also made songs based on special events, photos and videos of the protest and applied songs that develop nationalism. Video clips of people getting on trains and coming to Galleface, and how people came running along the road knowing that they were coming to attack us and more videos of the big demonstrations of the Inter-University Student Union. We made videos with beautiful songs in their videos.

We put those video tapes on Facebook using songs like the song called “yeti padiye ethic gemma” (power of the lover class people) and another song that starts with the words “Ran Malak lesa dew bambum (It is a patriotic song). (06 the protester, 2023.03.11, private discussion).

Wiru sisu gee (Heroic student songs), poems, etc. used by the Inter-University Student Union in their protests have become common motivational songs during this time.

I have heard a group shouting slogans on the side of the road saying which way are we going, the way Janaka

Sisitha (A dead University Union leader) went. Actually, those guys don't even know who is Janaka and who is Sisitha. But they became common slogans by then. Poems that were common only to Inter University Student Union had become poems for the whole society (1 st protester, 2023.04.04, private discussion).

CONCLUSION

This research study mainly studied the use of Facebook by social media activists and public opinion leaders to shape and motivate public opinion during the initiation and broadcast of the Galleface protest.

While focusing on the use of Facebook media for the creation of the Galleface protest, it became clear that by organizing small protests and silent protests through the Facebook media, the background has been set for the creation of the main protest for the public. By organizing a silent protest at the Viharamaha Devi Park, it seems that an attempt has been made to give the people an idea of the peaceful path that the protest should take. The public opinion has been prepared for the creation of the 2022 Galleface protest through the organization, activity, motivation, broadcasting of that protest as well as the related post-protests and discussions. A non-verbal communication that a revolution will take place in the near future has been done by the agitation held in Pagiriwatte, Mirihana. Even through the emergency notification made through Facebook, the public joining the place, using social media including Facebook to communicate that such a protest is going on, it is clear that the protest has been successful in getting the required media coverage through social media. Therefore, it has become clear that a broad program can be maintained through social media to broadcast the protest. Facebook has played a crucial role in mobilizing and motivating the Galleface protest by building a platform for communication and networking among protesters.

The data analysis led to the creation of Facebook networks covering every Gota Go Gama and the use of music, texts, colors and catchy names on Facebook to engage the public in the protest. It has created the way to continue the protest.

Through Habermas' theory of public space (1991), he also socialized the public to act as a member of the public space in a public social need in order to build public opinion. He called public space the space related to holding public discussions etc. for the political society. According to the data of this research, it can be concluded that Facebook media has become a public space of the protest for the creation and maintenance of the 2022 Galleface protest through the communication of the protest through Facebook media. Facebook media interventions related to the protest have mostly been done by the young generation who maintain a more active relationship on Facebook media and question the current crisis. In maintaining the protest process, Facebook media has been used in building public opinion by presenting information about its goals and objectives to the public. Facebook has also been used to share the updated information of the protest with the public, post photos, live videos and other videos of the protest and maintain a proper communication process with the public.

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