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Impact of Cultural Traits on the Use of Web 2.0 Technology in Conflict-Hit Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The web 2.0 has greatly transformed the approach of using the web. Kashmir being one of the worst conflict-hit regions in the world has greatly approached Web 2.0 applications as a platform during unrest and social disturbances. In this milieu the present study makes an effort to envisage the influence of different Hofstede's cultural traits of Kashmir on the use of Web 2.0 applications.*

Methodology –*A structured questionnaire based on review of literature was employed to collect the data as per the set objectives. The resultant data was analyzed to come up with valid findings*

Findings – *The study reveals that there is a significant impact of cultural traits of the denizens of Kashmir in their use of web 2.0 technologies especially Social Networking sites. Further, the periods of unrest and turmoil in valley significantly influence the use of Web 2.0 applications in the valley.*

Practical Implications – *The study helps to better understand the usage of web 2.0 technologies by younger generation. As web 2.0 technologies are aligned on the concepts of communication, collaboration and information sharing, the study helps to understand how in conflict areas, Web 2.0 affects various aspects including edification of the young adults.*

Keywords – *Web 2.0, Social Networks, SNS, Conflict, Kashmir, Hofstede Model*

INTRODUCTION

With the spread of high-speed networks, the internet allows a greater flexibility in work. Internet-based technologies especially Web 2.0 nowadays is playing a significant role in the way that societies communicate with each other. It's a fact that the technologies allow information to be readily exchanged without geographic and

time barriers. Web 2.0 can be well enunciated as the change from being a search engine and a website to a pooled networking environment that initiates research, work, entertainment, education, and social activities. Web 2.0 is an approach rather than a technology **(Davis, 2005)** and some consider it to be a social movement **(Birdsall, 2007)**. Every culture, be it ethnic or racial is different, and not all technologies are acceptable in all cultures. In this context, the present study made an effort to assess the influence of different cultural traits of conflict hit Kashmir on the use of Web 2.0 technologies. The study uses Hofstede's 5-dimensional cultural model to study the shared beliefs, values and norms of Kashmir and how these factors can envisage a widespread variety of human practices and behaviour under stressful surroundings.

Web 2.0 are those web tools that act as a platform of communication and interaction with audience and allow them to collaborate, comment and edit information, creating a system whereby the separation between creator and viewer is indistinct **(Storey, 2006)**. Some take it as a technology, **Downes (2005)** calls it a community-driven online platform rather than technology while the others refer it as the second generation of web-based services and tools **(Geser, 2012)**. Web 2.0 provides users with many opportunities for social collaboration and interaction.

There has been a major impact of technology on the societies and their cultures. Each change has affected the relation between people and also how cultures expand or end. Technology has a vast impact on the growth of nations, on the livelihood of people, and who owns what. Different research studies have revealed that different cultures respond differently to new technologies **(Allen, 2017; Kumar & Krishnan, 2002; Maitland & Bauer, 2001)** Cultures considerably influence the technology use **(Ribière, Haddad & Wiele, 2010)**. Further **Slowikowski and Jarratt (2013)** also are of the view that nationality and culture have a power to influence the adoption of technology products. The growing use of the internet has provoked discussions and debates regarding the relation between technologies and cultures **(Li & Kirkup, 2007)**. Culture to be an important feature in swaying how societies accept, use, and react to Internet **(Collis, 1999)**. Various studies have explored the diversity in the usage of the Internet in different cultures. There is a vibrant difference between western countries and non-western countries in terms of the internet usage **(Hermeking, 2005)**. There is a strong association between the use of internet and cultural magnitudes. Technologies do have a social impact **(Yeniyurt & Townsend, 2003)**. They are social products that symbolize to strengthen the relationships, social structures and goals **(Edwards, 1994.)**. Web 2.0 technologies are the enablers to a set of cultural and social movements that are changing our world. Culture is an essential factor in the utilization of web 2.0 applications for learning **(Eze, 2009; Morgan, 2014)**. Web 2.0 applications' use is greatly affected by cultural differences **(Pfeil, Zaphiris & Ang, 2006**). The social networking tools like Facebook has assertive and direct influences on people particularly the younger lot **(Lichy & Kachour, 2017).** In sum the use and acceptance of Web 2.0 by users is greatly affected by their cultural differences. From the research, it is revealed that the use of internet especially Web 2.0 technologies is affected by the differences in culture**.**

WEB 2.0 AND UNREST

The role of internet in social unrest and revolutions has harvested significant attention in recent years. Research demonstrates a positive relationship between frequency of internet use and social unrest particularly protest participation **(Said-Hung & Luquetta-Cediel, 2018**; **Pearce & Kendzior, 2012)**. Internet can allow a movement to be quick about its action, organizing campaigns around fixed dates, protest movements etc. which can spread hundreds of thousands of supporters with a single Facebook post or Tweet, throwing a massive call to action in seconds **(Papic & Noonan, 2011)**. **Valenzuela, Arriagada and Scherman (2014)** in their study examine changes in the relationship between use of social networking and growing social unrest among the younger population in Chile. The results show that both Facebook and Twitter have substantial effects on the probability of protesting, though these effects vary across platforms and time. The social media can be just as useful for the powerful political leaders who are being protested against as it is for the protestors themselves. **Petray (2011)** explored the role of internet in the activism of Aboriginal people in Townsville. As per the author older activists are not as comfortable with digital communications technology as their younger counterparts. Thus, they have been sluggish in adoption of these new, interactive technologies. However, the activists know the essential potential of web 2.0 for networking opportunities, and are trying to drive in themselves in this milieu. Singleton, Rola-Rubzen, Muir, Muir and M. McGregor (2009) also argues that interactive digital technologies like YouTube can empower young people as they share their culture with an outside audience. Egypt's revolution in 2011 became one of the preeminent known symbols of Web 2.0-facilitated social movements to date, despite the fact that its proportion of Internet access (barely 20%) is much lower than in Tunisia or Iran. **(Wenker, 2012)**. **Kidd and Mclntosh (2016)** deliberate that the revolutionary movements nowadays certainly embrace social media. Protests in the streets are no less significant today than they have been for movements in the past, and it may in fact be harder to get societies into the roads in an age of social media. Furthermore, the targets of the revolutionary movements – administrations, military, and police – are also on social media and using it very effectively as a tool for reconnaissance. **Hanrath and Leggewie (2013)** warns that new social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, etc., should, nonetheless, be overestimated, and that besides having a potentially democratizing and emancipatory effect, these new media harbor a number of risks and potential for misuse. Although there can be little doubt that the use of social networking media has added a number of new dimensions to the initiation, organization, and coverage of political upheaval, precisely what role social media played, and to what effect, has yet to be discovered.

KASHMIR RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AND WEB 2.0

Kashmir is known as the paradise on earth. But, Kashmir has remained one of the worst conflicted area since 1947 between three nuclear powers viz., India, Pakistan and China **(Shoaib & Shafiq, 2015)**. With the continuous turbulence and conflict

in the valley, there are some set standards to deal with unrests in Kashmir, historically, excessive use of force on streets, wanton thrashing of people including media men to instill fear and random arrests. If it all fails to curb the anger finally internet ban comes into play in Kashmir **(Khalid, 2017, May 8)**. The role of Web 2.0 and in particular Social Networks in conflict hit Kashmir has intensified the spread of socio-political movement particularly amongst youth. The situation due to this has deteriorated further after the 2016 uprising where internet has remained suspended for months together.

HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL MODEL

To study the impact of Kashmir culture on the use of web 2.0 tools in a politico-military setting, the present study considered the Hofstede's Five (5) cultural dimensions viz., power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long versus short-term orientation to study the shared beliefs, values and norms of Kashmir and how these factors can envisage a widespread variety of human practices and behaviour under stressful surroundings. These dimensions are:

PDI (POWER DISTANCE INDEX)

This dimension is construed as the extent to which a society and its members accept that power in institutions is dispersed unequally **(Hofstede, 1991). Steenkamp (2001)** says that power distance is related to maintaining the rank difference and conservatism. It can be defined as an index that measures the distribution of power and wealth between people in a nation or culture. It aims to determine the degree to which subordinates submit to authority.

UAI (UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE INDEX)

Uncertainty avoidance is the measure of uncertainty and ambiguity tolerance among the societies. Societies that have high uncertainty avoidance value have more perfect rules, security and primness towards life **(Hofstede, 1980)**. **Hofstede (1991)** further explains it as the degree of threat and risk by unknown or uncertain situations amongst the members of a culture. High Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) cultures are dependent on rules and regulations while as low Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) cultures depend less on rules and are trustworthy **(Mooij, 2000).**

IDV (INDIVIDUALISM VS COLLECTIVISM)

The dimension defines the relation between the individual and the group. It relates to the degree of integration of individuals within groups and lays emphasis on the role of the individual versus the role of the community. The degree of importance given to individuality in societies defines the cultural variability of that society. Therefore,

cultures where individualistic interests prevail over group interests are individualist, and those where the group interests prevail are collectivist **(Fang, 2005).**

MAS (MASCULINITY VS FEMININITY)

According to **Hofstede (2001)** this dimension refers to cultures' verdicts regarding the insinuations and implications genders (males and females) should have for the social and emotional roles. It measures masculinity-femininity as a cultural dimension, and the roles played by them in societies. This reveals the degree confidence versus nurturance in a society and is related to prospects and expectations of roles played by genders. Masculine cultures signify accomplishment, valor, and decisiveness. In contrast, feminine societies give worth to equality, relationships, caring and do not have stiff gender roles **(Hofstede, 1980).** This dimension gives clear differences between ambitious and performance focused males, versus tender, modest, females.

LTO (LONG TERM ORIENTATION VS SHORT TERM ORIENTATION)

This last dimension measures people's consideration and thought for the future. According to **Hofstede (2001)**, long-term orientated cultures have characteristics like tradition adaptation, persistence, perseverance and future sightedness. In contrast, short-term orientated cultures expect hasty outcomes.

METHODS AND TOOLS USED

The methodology for present study comprised of following stages*:*

STAGE-I

A review of relevant literature was conducted to evolve and refine the methodology and tools to satisfy the objectives. Accordingly, methodology for present study was refined to make findings more scientific and logical.

STAGE-II

Experience and knowledge gained during Stage-I helped study to evolve a comprehensive questionnaire. The Geert Hofstede's model was adopted to measure the impact of local culture and its attributes on use of Web 2.0 tools. This model was employed in framing of questionnaire by applying 5-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire was divided into six-parts. The first part dealt with the general awareness about Web 2.0 tools. The rest of the five parts of questionnaire dispensed the information and questions about the culture and conflict in Kashmir keeping in view the 5-dimensions of Hofstede's model. The study considered this model only to identify

the factors that can be applied to know about various factors that can evaluate a nation's culture.

STAGE-III

In order to carry out the study, proportionate manageable stratified random sampling was applied. Out of the total population of 1980 undergraduate students of Department of Law (D1), Department of Management Studies (D2), Department of Department of Electronics (D3) and Department of Pharmacy (D4); where D1=760, D2=640, D3=320 & D4= 260; 15% of population was selected for the study. Overall 297 questionnaires were distributed in D1, D2, D3 & D4. Out of 297 questionnaires 276 were responded whereas 21 students did not respond. Among 297 questionnaires, 114 questionnaires were randomly distributed in D1 in which 105 responded, out of which 78 were males and 27 were females. Similarly, in D2, 96 questionnaires were distributed with cent per cent response rate among in which 81 were females and 15 males. Likewise, in D3 and D4, a total of 48 and 39 questionnaires were distributed and 13 and 12 questionnaires were received back respectively. Amongst the respondents, the D3 had a total of 27 males and 12 females while as in D4 there were 12 males and 24 female respondents. Table 1 offers a lucid picture.

Table 1. Number of Students Randomly Selected for the Study

Gender	D1	D2	D3	D4	Total
Males (%)	74.3	15.6	69.3	33.3	47.8
Females (%)	25.7	84.4	30.7	66.7	52.1

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

POWER DISTANCE

Although power distance has a very broad connotation but current study focused on relation of parents with their wards due to the fact that young generation in a conflict zone is usually not allowed by their parents/guardians to be themselves and meet wider society for fear of their life. This kind of scenario is always vivid in Kashmir, where more than hundred thousand youth have become victim of the conflict.

PARENTAL SUPERVISION

The responses about the parental supervision on online behaviour of their wards in the study depicts that 29.3% students [males (40.9%) females (19.1%)] have to follow strict rules and regulations set by their parents while they are online. Around 32.6% students have more freedom and are only supervised occasionally about their

online behaviour by their elders [in which females with 46.8% are advised more to remain cautious in the web environment than males (18.1%)]. A good number of students i.e., 36.9% (including 40.9% males and 34% females) say that no such controls are put by their parents, which is a positive development considering the society under study. This augurs well for the future and tells a thing or two about cultural flexibility and adaptability, even though living in a very hostile condition where people can be whispered away on petty rumors.

In a study conducted on Internet use by children in Turkey, it was highlighted that parents' approaches are essential aspects for efficient use of Internet by children **(Odabasi, 2005).** Similarly**, Ponte, & Simões (2009)** reveal that parents' concerns about their children's online activities may be shaped by many factors like their own online experience. Thus, the concern of online safety and security force parents to establish rules and advise their children time and again about the online internet threats and their behaviour. Hence it can be deduced that parents do often supervise their wards in their online activities. This factor increases the power gap between the generations, hence making Kashmir a high power indexed society whereby elders are more in command than youngsters. This finding is on expected lines given the arguments cited above. Table 2 offers a lucid picture.

Table 2. Parental Supervision

Response	Males					Females					Grand Total
	D1 N=78	D2 N=15	D3 N=27	D4 N=12	Total N=132	D1 N=27	D2 N=81	D3 N=12	D4 N=24	Total N=144	N= 276
Yes	53.8	40	0	50	40.9	33.3	11.1	0	37.5	19.1	29.3
No	26.9	40	88.8	25	40.9	44.4	33.3	25	25	34	36.9
Sometimes	19.2	20	11.1	25	18.1	22.2	51.8	75	37.5	46.8	32.6

UNCERTAINITY AVOIDANCE

Military conflicts always lead uncertainty, chaos and depression which in turn leads to many social evils and unexpected behaviour by people. This study made an attempt to know how Web 2.0 tools are increasing or overcoming uncertainty in people of Kashmir. The study found that majority of students (70.6%) agree that an atmosphere of serenity and contentment is created via. Web 2.0 tools especially SNS. Only 28.2% deny it. This also becomes truer in a conflict zone, where surroundings are full of fear, chaos and uncertainty. Besides, they affirm that the use of social media and technology keep us in touch with friends in an efficient manner and can share, celebrate and rejoice with our friends. It makes us happy and blissful. Hence it can be deduced that SNS is evolving as one of the channels to create an atmosphere of serenity and contentment even in conflicted zone like Kashmir. The elaborated data is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Creation of Atmosphere of Serenity and Contentment

Response	Total
Yes	70.6 %
No	28.2%

EFFECT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

The study observed that social networks may increase anxiety and depression (33.6%). While decent number of students said that SNS decrease (20.6%) or have no effect (23.9%) on them. In a study conducted by **Rajani and Chandio (2004)** on the effect of Internet on society it was found that an increased Internet use led to increased isolation, despair, diminished socialism and poor family interaction.

Thus, we conclude that the use of web 2.0 tools and services use especially SNS may increase the anxiety and depression among students. Due to the fact SNS has become main source of information for youth. In conflict-hit Kashmir, most of the news is pertaining to curbs, arrests and killings that can have adverse effects on people that leads to anxiety and depression. Table 4 gives lucid details.

Table 4. Effect of Social Networks on Anxiety and Depression

Response	Total
Increase	33.6%
Decrease	20.6%
No Effect	23.9%

EFFECT OF TURMOIL AND DISTURBANCES ON THE USAGE OF WEB TECHNOLOGIES

The present study was conducted in a conflict zone and people confront turmoil and political disturbance that usually affect all spheres of life. Therefore, study made an endeavour to know whether these disturbances have any impact on netizens. It was found that majority of undergraduates (54.3%) feel that turmoil or disturbances affect their usage of Web technologies whereas only small minority (7.6%) reveal that it does not affect them at all. Almost one-third of students (30.4%) believe that it sometimes does affect their usage and 6.5% said they have no idea about it as shown in Table 5. This indicates that overall, turmoil or disturbances in valley have a prodigious impact on the usage of Web technologies, especially SNS.

Table 5 Effect of Turmoil and Disturbances

Response	Total
Yes	54.3%
No	7.6%
Sometimes	30.4%
Can't say	6.5%

MASCULINITY-FEMINITY

An endeavour was made to observe who among the two genders are first to make use of latest web 2.0 tools and services. The study found that, males are the first to try the latest web technologies with 88.6% response rate which is relatively higher than females (50%). Men tend to be more tech-savvy than women. It is concluded here that in Kashmir, males are more dominant over females in terms of using new Web 2.0 tools. This may be partly also because continuous conflict has effect on how females/girls should restrict their new experiments due to umpteen apprehensions of parents about their safety.

INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM

This study shows that majority of students (69.5%) are not apprehensive about society and its norms, while they use internet, they like to do whatever they want. Only 20.6% are concerned about society. Table 6 offers comprehensive details. **Ribière, et.al (2010)** in their study found that the engagement in social activities is being valued in various countries like U.S., Bahrain etc. and full collectivist attitude is being observed in these countries. The study further state that respondents considered themselves to be a part of group rather being individually independent. The present study thus totally contrasts the study of **Ribière, et.al (2010).** Individualism is preferred more than collectivism here in the context of using the Web tools and services which is drastic departure from past beliefs of local conservative cultural values. This could be because conflict zone demands and demonstrates survival of fittest and as such individual interest supersede collective interest.

Table 6. Individualism Versus Collectivism

Response	Total
Individualism	69.5%
Collectivism	20.6%
None	7.6%

LONG TERM ORIENTATION

Long-term orientation stands for a society that believe in future oriented virtues, and believe in determination. While short-term orientation stands for a society that fosters virtues that respect for tradition and fulfil societal responsibilities. **Ribière, et. al (2010)** in their study found that long-term oriented people are expected to have a greater web 2.0 usage level. In current study huge majority of students 75% students feel that web 2.0 tools and services don't help us in terms of saving our culture while as only 22.8% students say that web 2.0 tools can be used as an instrument to save cultural values. Kashmir is a short-term oriented culture which gives preference to respect for tradition. Thus, in a culture like this, one cannot expect Web 2.0 technologies to have a profound effect and with respect to the culture saving phenomena via, these tools, it was found that maximum number of students think that Web 2.0 tools are not used enough to save the rites, rituals and practices.

Table 7. Long- Term Orientation

Response	Total
Yes	22.8%
No	75%

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The results drawn from the study are thoroughly analyzed and necessary findings and conclusions are drawn based on the actual figures. The major findings are enumerated as follows:

POWER DISTANCE

Kashmir overall is average in power distance. This can be deduced from Table 2. Though internet use by youngsters in Kashmir is being restricted, but overall it is considered to be a necessity. There are restrictions and boundaries both by the government forces due to conflict reasons as well as by parents on their personal reasons on the use of internet in the valley. Higher authorities tend to be more biased on the matter of internet usage amongst the youngsters. There are strict restrictions in the society over the use of web technologies especially Social networks. Despite this Web 2.0 tools are being vividly used both by men and women in Kashmir.

UNCERTAINITY AVOIDANCE

Present study aligns "uncertainty avoidance" as being a persuasive variable in the determining the Web 2.0 usage. Kashmiris tend to be very sensitive to rough situations like political uproar or social insurgencies. People in Kashmir are more expressive and emotional thus having High UA index. Turmoil and riots in Kashmir

provokes youth particularly men to use Web 2.0 tools mainly Social Networks. Social media is used by the youth to circulate the ruthlessness of the forces in Kashmir. It is concluded that 54.3% students consider that turmoil and disturbance in Kashmir has an immense influence on their usage of Web 2.0 technologies. Further limited rules and regulations are necessary to be imposed on the internet, as a large chunk of 58.4% students believe that Social networks often spread rumors and fabricated things which provokes unnecessary uproar in the valley but gagging it is not any solution to the turmoil in valley.

MASCULINITY-FEMINITY

The perception of gender discernment occurs more or less in every society. Like other societies/communities in the Indian subcontinent, the Kashmiri women also face certain amount of gender-based discrimination. However, due to modernization, this situation has changed to a large extent. Our study revealed that for the age cohort of 18-22, men and women are equally likely to use social networking sites. It was exposed through this study that 50% think women are more enthusiastic online than men, but at the same time a huge per cent of students (88.6%) think that men are the first to try out new web technologies.

INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM

Study found that the engagement in social activities is appreciated by the students in Kashmir. They are more or less apprehensive with the influence of society on them. It was found that 53.4% students think that intense use of web 2.0 tools mostly SNS cause social isolation among the students. But at the same time the same percentage of students feel that social goals and interaction can be strengthened via. Social Networks like Facebook. Web 2.0 applications are beneficial for safeguarding future in terms of social collaborations, developing relations of private or professional nature. Thus, it can be assumed that web 2.0 tools support the collectivistic characteristic of a culture.

LONG-TERM ORIENTATION

Since Kashmir is a short-term oriented culture which gives preference to fulfilling social obligations, respect for tradition and protecting one's 'face'. Thus in a culture like this, one cannot expect Web 2.0 technologies to have a profound effect and with respect to the culture saving phenomena via, these tools, it was found that 75% students consider that Web 2.0 tools are not used enough to save the rites, rituals and practices of Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

With the phenomena of globalization and the diminishing cultural boundaries, very

less attention has been paid towards the need to understand how different cultures affect the use of various web technologies. The current study is an effort to study how a conflict-hit culture Kashmir perceives and uses the web 2.0 technologies. The study identified "uncertainty avoidance" as being a dominant factor in the calculation of internet usage. Further web 2.0 technologies are particularly being used for connection, communication, cooperation and collaboration. The students perceive web 2.0 tools as means to celebrate; rejoice with their friends and others; share and re-use the important content via social media. They feel that social networks are important tools to create atmosphere of contentment and serenity in conflict-hit zone like Kashmir. Web 2.0 tools especially Social Networks have helped the users particularly youth, in a very hostile and highly militarized area (viz., Kashmir) in the world, to expand the networks and most importantly globalize the movement of Kashmir. The study found that culture plays an important role in networking of resources and sharing of experiences in virtual world as well. Those cultures that are accommodative and flexible can sustain revolutionary changes and continue to thrive. Kashmir culture is accommodative to new thoughts and ideas and as such is one of the oldest surviving cultures of South-Asia with more than 5000 years of history.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research is the first step to understand the influence of conflict and cultural values of Kashmir in adoption and use of Web 2.0 technologies. This study has some limitations: The group under study has been limited to only youngsters between the age of 18-22 years and in only one university. The sample size is limited to 15% of the population. Further the study should explore different cultures for comparison and appraisal of the findings.

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