

Communicating on Twitter for Charity: Understanding the Wall of Kindness Initiative in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan

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This study highlights the important role of social media for charity through an analysis of tweets about the Wall of Kindness charity initiative in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, we employ a theoretical lens of social influence to explore how individuals and organizations used Twitter to promote charitable initiatives. User engagement on Twitter centered on content sharing and identification through hashtags, and imitative behaviors promoted the Wall of Kindness initiative across countries. Results from the thematic analysis reveal that Twitter users were tweeting about the Wall of Kindness to provide information, encourage donations, inspire others to action, and build an online community. Our content analysis reveals that a majority of the tweets were neutral and supportive of the initiative; users mostly shared textual information, followed by sharing images and videos, tweeting news links, and soliciting donations about the Wall of Kindness. Furthermore, media organizations, wall enthusiasts, and journalists were most active in tweeting about the charity initiative. Implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: social media, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, content analysis, thematic, sharing, charity, Wall of Kindness

Humans have always engaged in the act of sharing finite goods and services (Belk, 2014). Sharing has been viewed as “pro-social behavior” (Benkler, 2004, p. 275) that “fosters community” and has been traditionally manifested through dividing and distributing (Belk, 2007, p. 126). The advent of the Internet has complicated our understanding of sharing (Belk, 2007), because traditional sharing is typically based on ownership, and on the Internet, sharing is possible without actually owning something

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(Belk, 2014). Online users "are part of Internet sharing regardless of whether they make similar contributions themselves" (Belk, 2007, p. 129). The sharing of information on the Internet and online engagement, especially around causes, has led to active individual and community engagement and activism among those who may have never participated before (Bennett, 2014).

Social media engagement occurs at various levels in a myriad of settings (Khan, 2017). Previous studies have determined that social media has been instrumental in promoting contemporary social movements. Some of these movements have created sizable political and societal change, such as in the case of the Arab Spring (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011), the Egyptian protests in Tahrir Square (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), and the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia (Lowrance, 2016). Social media has also been employed by users to engage in celebrity philanthropic causes and activism (Bennett, 2014) and advocacy by nonprofit organizations (Guo & Saxton, 2014). However, little research has examined how smaller and loosely organized yet impactful initiatives create social media buzz and even gain popularity in the mainstream media. One such prominent community initiative is the Wall of Kindness or *Deewar-e-Mehrabani* (Urdu/Persian: دیوار مهربانی). The Wall of Kindness may be viewed as a relatively new philanthropy phenomenon that promotes sharing through the free distribution of used items of daily use made available to the general public at designated locations in various countries ("Iranians spontaneously create," 2015). Both mainstream and social media activity indicate that the Wall of Kindness has become a viral phenomenon spreading from Iran to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, China, and a range of other countries.

Our motivation for the study is rooted in observing how the Wall of Kindness gained international media attention, contributed to widespread social media activity, and led to real action on the ground in the formation of these walls. The Wall of Kindness challenges and expands our traditional understanding of sharing and introduces a relatively new way of giving in which social media plays a pivotal role. To understand this unique charity initiative, we analyze publicly available Twitter data for activities surrounding the Wall of Kindness, which were most profound for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran—geographically proximate countries that share a similar culture and religion.

This study offers an exploratory analysis of the Wall of Kindness initiative. Using social influence theory (Kelman, 1958), we studied individual interactions and imitative behaviors of users on Twitter in the formation of a community and identity around a common cause. This theoretical lens helps us advance understanding of how social media sharing and activism can influence the sharing of goods and services in the physical world.

Literature Review

In 2014, a South African art director and designer, Max Pazak, and copywriter Kayli Vee Levitan came up with the idea of a clothing swap shop, which was named The Street Store. According to the Facebook page of The Street Store (having a fan following of more than 66,000 people in June 2017), the first location opened in Auckland, New Zealand, in August 2014 (The Street Store, 2017). The idea was to make it "easier for people to donate and more dignified to receive" (Rooyen, 2014, para. 6). A similar initiative spread under a different name, Wall of Kindness. It is likely that The Street Store concept inspired some individuals to create the Wall of Kindness in Iran and beyond. Someone painted a wall and

installed hooks on which to hang used clothes for the needy in Iran, after which the idea spread to the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan ("Iranians spontaneously create," 2015).

The Internet and Social Media in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan

Globally, Twitter has about 320 million active users, and 79% of Twitter accounts are outside the United States (Twitter, 2016). Little research exists about the Internet and social media in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. These three countries share not only a physical border (see Figure 1) but a common religion and various cultural features. During several historical periods, "Afghanistan, Iran, and West Pakistan were politically joined, partly or totally, but never in a voluntary association, always as parts of empires" (Dupree, 1963, p. 383). Most people who inhabit these countries speak a language that is part of the Indo-Iranian family of languages (Dupree, 1963). Farsi and Urdu languages share various similarities. Among them are the terms *Deewar-e-Mehrabani* (Urdu and Persian/Farsi: دیوار مہربانی). These words are both spoken in the same way and mutually recognizable in written form. Therefore, even though Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran are three distinct countries with their own systems of government, they do share various cultural, linguistic, and religious traits, which may explain the widespread proliferation of the Wall of Kindness.

Pakistan

Social media shows high growth in Pakistan. As of February 2017, it was estimated that there were 44 million social media users, and 37 million mobile broadband subscribers (Ibrahim, 2017). Although Internet access is not available for most of Pakistan's population, the urban areas where connectivity is relatively better lead major growth in the use of social media, especially due to the rapid spread of 3G/4G mobile penetration. In 2016, there were 3.1 million Twitter users and 30 million Facebook users in Pakistan (Ibrahim, 2017).

Iran

Iran is the largest Persian/Farsi-speaking country, with a total population of 80 million (Statista, 2016). As of 2016, Iran had 39.1 million Internet users (Internet Live Stats, 2017). An Iranian online research panel (Knowles, 2012) surveyed 2,300 people and found that 58% of respondents regularly use Facebook despite blocks and censorship, 37% use Google+, 14% use Cloob (a local Iranian network), 12% use Twitter, and 12% use LinkedIn.

Afghanistan

There are 4.01 million Internet users in Afghanistan, comprising 12% of the population (Ateed, 2017). According to a report by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2014) based on six northern provinces and Kabul, Facebook is the most dominant and widely used social media platform in Afghanistan with 87.8% of Internet users. The second most prominent platform is Google+ (12.9% of users) followed by YouTube (5.8% of users) and Twitter (3.8%). Social media use is on the rise in Afghanistan, mainly fueled by mobile Internet (Ateed, 2017).



Figure 1. Geographic proximity of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran (map generated with Tableau).

Twitter for Online Sharing and Social Conversations

Sharing has been referred to as “the keyword of our times” (Gehl, 2017, p. 3587). With the advancement and maturity of online social media, sharing has become an established norm. People engage online and share content in the form of text, images, and videos and express their emotions and views through likes, comments, and shares (Khan, 2017; Lee, Park, Kim, Kim, & Moon, 2011; Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016).

Sharing has been viewed as a primary activity on social media and as a way to communicate feelings, emotions, and values (John, 2013). Twitter serves as an effective platform of “ambient” photojournalism, such as in the 2008 U.S. elections and the 2009 election in Iran, providing firsthand reports of events (Hermida, 2010). Twitter provides an excellent platform where individuals can form temporary, often loosely organized, online communities around shared interests. For instance, through the use of hashtags on Twitter, individuals can engage in a concurrent online activity without being part of any preexisting network (Chang, 2010). With the proliferation of communication via social media, conversations that traditionally took place in settings that were bound by time and space are now possible “asynchronously” in “shared social context(s)” (boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). Twitter supports direct conversations between individuals, groups, and the wider public and is useful for engaging in community outreach (Hagman, 2012). This leads us to our first research question:

RQ1: *What types of social conversations were taking place about the Wall of Kindness on Twitter?*

Charitable Giving

Individuals usually support a worthy cause by either volunteering or donating. Studies such as List (2011) have found that charitable giving continues to grow regardless of good and bad economic times. In fact, the number of U.S. registered nonprofit organizations, which also provide charity to regions outside the United States, increased 60% from 1995 to 2005 (List, 2011). Dobson (2007) posits that “people do charity better than they do justice. It is much easier to do charity, of course—one can switch it on and off” (p. 281).

One significant question raised by many scholars is: Why do individuals share or give away their hard-earned money? The motivations for giving could be many; however, previous studies have highlighted “private benefits” as a substantial motive for individuals’ charity (Vesterlund, 2006). Private benefits may involve giving to feel better about oneself; giving back to the community; receiving acknowledgment, satisfaction, prestige, reward; and gaining membership (Tullock, 1966; Vesterlund, 2006). Understanding the motives for charitable giving can help to further encourage and inspire sharing.

Charitable giving can also be understood from a caring perspective, which is often regarded as a universal moral value (Friedman, 1991). Silk (2004) viewed sharing and caring as “moral motivation” whereby the giver may never meet or even know about the intended beneficiary of the donation. Moreover, according to some religious beliefs, charity is highly encouraged as way of bringing justice and solidarity to the society (Clark, 2004). Charitable giving (including *Zakah* and *Sadaqah*, or Islamic charity) is one of the five pillars of Islam and forms a ritual act of worship for Muslims (Benthall, 1999; Kochuyt, 2009). According to the Islamic tradition, *Zakah* is an obligatory charity defined as a standard percentage of wealth per annum, and *Sadaqah* is voluntary charity that can be given in different forms to anyone in need at any time. *Sadaqah* is applicable in the context of the Wall of Kindness initiative in which those who donate via a wall may do so as desired and never know who benefited through their act of caring. Therefore, we are interested in learning, through our data, whether there are any other motivations or reasons for charitable sharing that are rooted in unique societal circumstances often dictated by culture, religion, regional instability, and harsh economic realities, especially in the lesser studied regions of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Because we believe that social media plays a central role in motivating and encouraging further donations as well as in spreading the idea of the Wall of Kindness, we employ the social influence theory to better understand how individuals are influenced into further action via social media.

Theoretical Framework: Social Influence Theory

Social influence theory (Kelman, 1958) helps scholars understand the mechanism of social influence on social media and explore the factors that determine users’ imitative behaviors. Social influence happens when the attitude or behavior of individuals is impacted by others in a social setting (Kelman, 1961). We argue that the social setting is being provided through #WallofKindness on social platforms such as Twitter.

The central premise of social influence is that a person's emotions, opinions, and behaviors impact others in their circle (Kelman, 1958). On Twitter, such emotions and opinions can be expressed through words of inspiration, support, encouragement, and praise in tweets. Kelman (1958) introduced three broad forms of social influence: (1) compliance, (2) identification, and (3) internalization. In a social setting, individuals accept influence for a favorable response (compliance), establish or maintain a significant "self-defining relationship" (identification), and accept a belief or behavior if the idea is innately rewarding (internalization) (Kelman, 1958). This leads us to our second research question:

RQ2a: Did Twitter users demonstrate compliance in the form of engagement with content to express favorable reactions or rewards for the Wall of Kindness?

A seminal study by McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined a community as something that has elements of membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connection. Different types of online communities are often organized around varied interests, topics, ideologies, and demographic attributes, in which members feel a sense of connectedness (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002), a common purpose, and shared interests (Wood & Judikis, 2002). Digital environments allow users to take advantage of "social affordances of digital networks to organize, support, and communicate, giving rise to a unique social entity, or what is now commonly known as a virtual community" (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002, p. 3). In recent years, hashtags are commonly used on sites such as Twitter around issues such as politics (#ausvotes), controversy and whistleblowing (#wikileaks), and causes and movements (#londonriots) (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Such Twitter activities have contributed to the formation of ad hoc public groups and, in some instances, a community of individuals with a common purpose. Our conceptualization of the Wall of Kindness online community is also based on the realization that Twitter users using the hashtag #WallofKindness had some form of association and a shared purpose of promoting the charity/sharing initiative.

In line with social influence theory, intentions to participate in a community, among other things, are a function of community influences (social identity) (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Identification reflects a person's association or relationship with a community or a cause and a sense of "belongingness and attachment" (Zhou, 2011). For example, Twitter users may identify closely with a hashtag (such as #WallofKindness) and develop feelings of connectedness, influence, and membership in a community. The third postulate of the social influence theory, internalization, happens when certain individuals "accept the influence due to the congruence of his/her values with those of group members" (Zhou, 2011, p. 68). We are interested in exploring how social influence manifests when Twitter users tweet about the Wall of Kindness initiative to identify with other users and show a sense of internalization. We, therefore, ask the following questions:

RQ2b: Is there evidence of identification manifested through use of specific words or hashtags to signify relationship to other individuals or a group related to the Wall of Kindness phenomenon on Twitter?

RQ2c: Did Twitter users express any evidence of internalization in the form of adoption of the Wall of Kindness in line with their belief system?

Method

Data Gathering and Cleaning

Following media reports in national and international newspapers, we searched for “Wall of Kindness” (English) and “دیوار مہربانی” (Urdu) on Twitter. We chose Twitter because it provides a convenient platform to post information about events (Ignacio, 2012) and gives a clear perspective on user interactions, information sharing, and insight into what people are thinking and doing (Sreenivasan, Lee, & Goh, 2011). Data collection began as soon as the hashtag #WalofKindness started showing some activity on Twitter in the region under study. Data were obtained from Twitter’s Streaming API between December 8, 2015, and August, 30, 2016.

The original data set contained a total of 4,249 tweets, out of which 3,641 tweets in English were obtained using the keywords “Wall of Kindness” and 608 tweets were obtained using the Urdu keywords “دیوار مہربانی.” Our search query included both the English and Urdu terms for the Wall of Kindness, because we wanted to cast a wide net and not limit the search to the hashtag for the topic. There may have been considerable Twitter activity about the Wall of Kindness on other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. However, we only collected Twitter data in English and Urdu.

Data were cleaned for bots and tweets that were spam. We also excluded 167 tweets that did not have clear profile information. One hundred tweets included fictitious links and were thus removed from the data set. After cleaning the data, a total of 3,982 tweets remained: 3,390 English tweets (85.1% of the data set) and 592 Urdu tweets (14.9% of the data set). Data were collected for more than eight months to capture the maximum possible activity surrounding the Wall of Kindness (see Figure 2).

Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted to systematically analyze the data. The content analysis followed a mixed approach. For the computer-assisted content analysis, we employed MS Excel and IBM SPSS 23 to help with the location information of the Wall of Kindness within a tweet (Kruikemeier, 2014). We also conducted manual coding of data and characterized Twitter users along various dimensions. Table 1 depicts the different demographic, support, and tweet types variables that were coded. We followed a stepwise strategy to infer gender. We first inferred about the gender of a Twitter user through the user’s name (Liu & Ruths, 2013); if that was not clear, we looked at the Twitter profile picture. Aligned with previous research procedures, we discarded tweets by users whose gender was not recognizable either through the name or the profile picture (Reis, Kwak, An, Messias, & Benevenuto, 2017).

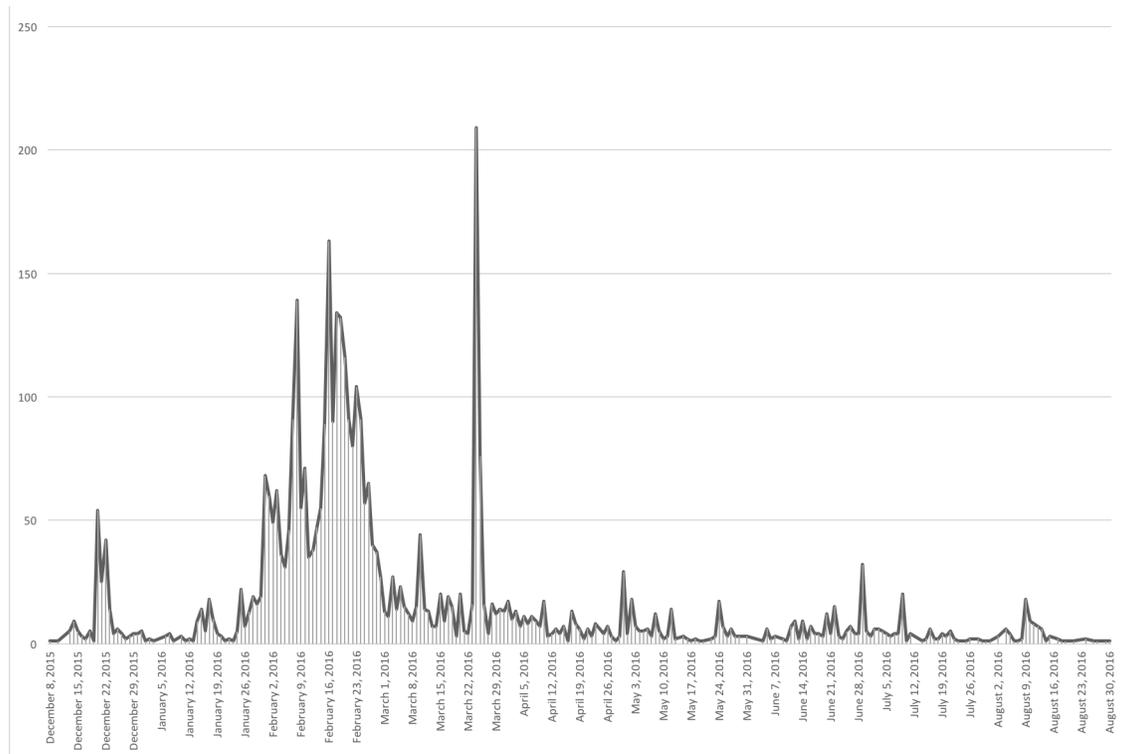


Figure 2. Tweet frequency.

Data Analyses

To determine a Twitter user's occupation, we created a classification scheme based on 12 categories (see Table 2). Each tweet was traced back to its author using the Twitter handle to learn about the person's or organization's occupation. Occupation information was obtained by reading the Twitter profile information. If such information was not clearly available, the user was added to the "wall enthusiast" category. This was based on the premise that anyone who tweets using the Wall of Kindness hashtag has some interest in and was enthusiastic about the initiative.

As depicted in Table 1, the support variables were coded as either supportive, critical, sarcastic, or neutral. For example, supportive tweets included positive words such as *brilliant*, *great*, *success*, *good cause*, and *noble*. Similarly, the coding scheme helped identify critical tweets as those in which individuals spoke against the wall.

Following a 60-minute training session and discussions about the coding scheme, two coders coded the Twitter data. When disagreements occurred, the item codes were reviewed and discussed for maximum clarity. A random sample of 10% of the tweets was examined for rater reliability. To determine

reliability, we used Scott's pi, which corrects for chance agreement (Scott, 1955). The coefficients for all variables were above the acceptable level or the minimum bound of .70 suggested by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005).

Thematic Analysis

We employed thematic analysis to understand the types of social conversations taking place about the Wall of Kindness on Twitter. Thematic analysis is ideal for identifying and analyzing salient themes in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Daly, Kellehear, & Glikman, 1997). The method centers on major patterns, which, after identification, are pieced together and cataloged into subthemes, thus providing a comprehensive view of the data (Aronson, 1995).

To conduct the thematic analysis, first, two of the three researchers carefully read and open-coded all the tweets. Second, the two researchers organized the codes into categories and subcategories and identified the emerging themes. Third, the overlapping themes were discussed, grouped, and the final themes were named. Last, to ensure the internal validity of the data, the two researchers reviewed all the tweets together one more time and double-checked each other's codes to agree on the final themes.

Results

The overall analysis from this study establishes that the Wall of Kindness initiative spread from one country to another, resulted in communal charity activity, and was based on linguistic symbols (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). We also found that 31.6% of the tweets in our data set contained photos or images of the Wall of Kindness. It is notable that the color of the wall varied by location since volunteers loosely organized the effort. The fact that a standard color scheme was not employed across all locations may mean that the idea of creating a space for hanging clothes for the needy took precedence over design and aesthetics considerations. What remained common was the use of the terms *Wall of Kindness* in English and *Deewar-e-Mehrabani* (دیوار مہربانی) in Urdu/Farsi.

Tweet content was mostly neutral about the Wall of Kindness (54.1%). Such tweets typically shared general information about the wall and its location. Supportive tweets were the most common after neutral tweets (38.7%). Tweets critical of the wall centered on how the wall is not a good initiative because it may encourage people to rely on charity and how the donation of clothes may create a mess in crowded places. In other instances, critical tweets concerned the location of the Wall of Kindness, stating that the wall is located in bigger cities, where people tend to be wealthier, and not in villages or remote areas, where people need them the most. Sarcastic tweets were about individuals posting political messages—especially in Pakistan, where they wanted to “hang corrupt politicians” instead of clothes.

Table 1. Variables, Reliabilities, Numbers of Tweets, and Percentages of Total Tweets.

Item	Scott's pi	Number of tweets	% of total tweets
Individuals by gender			
Male	0.85	1,983	49.8%
Female	0.89	775	19.5%
Organizations	0.97	1,224	30.7%
Support			
Supportive	0.87	1,540	38.7%
Critical	0.92	124	3.1%
Sarcastic	0.96	165	4.1 %
Neutral	0.94	2,153	54.1%
Type of tweet content (not mutually exclusive)			
Information shared	0.90	2,013	50.6%
News link shared	0.98	1,162	29.2%
Link to a blog post	0.91	867	21.8%
Image shared	0.99	1,257	31.6%
Video shared	0.97	72	1.8%
Donations solicited	0.93	346	8.7%
Religious message shared	0.89	88	2.2%

Regarding the type of information shared in the tweets, about 30% of users shared news links. This indicates that there was considerable media coverage of this initiative and that Twitter played a role in the spread of this information via news links. About an equal number of users shared images of the actual wall in various locations. This indicated the level of popularity of the Wall of Kindness and the role of photography in further popularizing the idea (see Appendix). Many users expressed excitement in sharing images as well as videos of the Wall of Kindness that they created. A relatively small number of users (8.7%) asked for donations or direct support for the Wall of Kindness in a particular location. The content analysis also revealed that a small proportion of tweets contained religious messages to promote the Wall of Kindness.

Twitter-based activity surrounding this initiative was most pronounced in Pakistan (76% of tweets), followed by Afghanistan, and then Iran, during our study's data-gathering time frame. Other countries where tweets depicted some presence of the Wall of Kindness were China, Italy, the United States, and Iraq. Close to 70% of the tweets were by individuals (both men and women). Moreover, female Twitter users were comparatively greater in number for Iran, followed by Afghanistan, and then Pakistan.

Table 2 depicts the professional roles by occupation. Results reveal that Wall of Kindness enthusiasts were the most active in tweeting about the Wall of Kindness. More than half of the tweets in the data set were by wall enthusiasts. The second and third largest categories of users were media organizations (17.3%) and journalists or media persons (11.8%). Interestingly, advocacy and charity organization both had tweets that made up less than 3% of the data.

Table 2. Occupation Classifications Based on Twitter Profiles, Numbers of Tweets, and Reliabilities.

	Scott's pi	Number of tweets	% of total tweets
Organizations			
Media organization	0.83	687	17.3%
Business	0.82	404	10.1%
Advocacy organization	0.86	61	1.5%
Charity organization	0.92	32	0.8%
Government and armed forces official	0.92	23	0.6%
Educational institution	0.96	21	0.5%
Religious organization	0.89	19	0.5%
Individuals			
Wall enthusiast	0.81	1,936	48.6%
Media person/journalist	0.82	470	11.8%
Activist	0.83	174	4.4%
Educator/teacher/researcher	0.84	93	2.3%
Politician or political worker	0.91	62	1.6%

RQ1 asks about the types of social conversations taking place about the Wall of Kindness on Twitter. The thematic analysis of tweets revealed four key themes: (1) providing information, (2) encouraging donations, (3) inspiring others to action, and (4) building a virtual community around a charity initiative.

Providing Information

Twitter users from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran tweeted informative messages about the Wall of Kindness, such as the locations of the walls, the types of items people could donate, and tweets related to various Wall of Kindness inauguration ceremonies. For example, users tweeted: "Wall of Kindness reached Kabul," "#wallofkindness becomes national trend," "After Peshawar Lahore Sahiwal Karachi it reaches Faisalabad. Pl help retweet," "WalOfKindness in Rawalpindi is located at the Siddiqui chowk on Saidpur Road! Donate if you can," "It will be inaugurated today by 2 PM!" (Twitter, 2016). Information about a wall's location, activities surrounding the initiative, and inauguration ceremonies highlight the usefulness of the acts of sharing, guiding others to action, and providing a sense of ownership and volunteering. Images (31.8% of the tweets) of the walls in various locations provided proof of the initiative's popularity in addition to making it a fashionable trend.

Encouraging Donations

In addition to informative messages, Twitter users shared messages that promoted charity and encouraged others to donate. Twitter users in both English and Urdu viewed the Wall of Kindness as an opportunity for donation and contribution to improve others' lives. Twitter users perceived this as a reciprocal action and inspired one another to give and share through inspiring messages, such as "Kindness is contagious #WalOfKindness," "Love is when you serve mankind," and "Lets share some #kindness with #WalOfKindness," and "#Wallofkindness . . . Make it a world . . . Donate" (Twitter, 2016). Several tweets encouraged donation via religious messages.

Inspiring Others to Action

Most Twitter messages around the Wall of Kindness were inspiring, optimistic, and called for action. A prominent journalist (@michaelkugelman) tweeted, "I'm hearing a lot about this #WalOfKindness initiative, which has recently arrived in Lahore. What a great concept. I hope it goes global." Many messages served as a source of unity and solidarity. For example, the following tweet was retweeted multiple times: "Finally, a wall to unite people, not divide them" (Twitter, 2016). Another tweet stated, "This wall of kindness is the best I heard about today ❤️ faith in humanity is restored ❤️." This theme revealed that Twitter users usually inspired others to action by sharing emotional messages on Twitter. Emotional and highly positive messages were quite visible in tweets. Previous research has found that emotionally charged messages are more likely to be shared (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Building Virtual Community and Identification

Building a sense of community was another major theme that emerged from the data set. The tweets about the Wall of Kindness manifest the way individuals come together to build an imagined community (Anderson, 2006) that is based on giving and sharing. Twitter users identified the act of giving and sharing as markers of their imagined community and took pride in this initiative. Twitter users shared messages such as, "This is what we are and this is how we want Pakistan to be portrayed. Helping each other" (Twitter, 2016). Some tweets referred to how the Wall of Kindness would strengthen local communities and bring them together: "#Wallofkindness brought community together!" and "The 'Wall of Kindness' that is providing the poor with warm clothes and food during winter#kindness #community." Twitter users from Afghanistan and Iran also emphasized community building by taking pride in the act of giving and sharing. One Twitter user expressed: "Iranian are the initiators of Wall of Kindness and all other act of kindness."

The second set of research questions concerns the postulates of the social influence theory. RQ2a asked whether we found evidence of compliance in the form of engagement with tweets. This implies that users tweeted about the Wall of Kindness to gain rewards or approval. In this case, approval may be attained via likes and retweets. Because the nature of this study is exploratory, and not survey based, we can only deduce that there will be signs showing a high number of likes and retweets or overall engagement for tweets that provided some information or promoted the Wall of Kindness.

Table 3 depicts the top 10 most retweeted and most liked tweets about the Wall of Kindness. These tweets provide information about the wall's location, commend the efforts of individuals active in promoting and creating the wall, and ask for donations. Users who commended the effort, informed others about the initiative, asked for donations, and indicated the location of the wall received more likes/favorites and retweets. This may indicate the presence of compliance according to social influence theory.

RQ2b inquired about the presence of identification manifested through hashtags leading to the formation of a loosely connected community. In general, the purpose of a hashtag is to categorize, monitor, contribute, and track a social conversation. Studies show that, although hashtag use is voluntary on social media, instead of creating new ones, social media users tend to adopt and share the same hashtags (Chang, 2010). In different studies, hashtags were used for various purposes: humor (Sills, 2017), frustration (Myrick, Holton, Himelboim, & Love, 2016), raising awareness (Bowles Eagle, 2015), and more. We found that, while all tweets contained the phrase "Wall of Kindness" signifying a community around the concept, 1,016 tweets contained the hashtag #WallofKindness. A hashtag carries a deeper meaning because it indicates that users are trying to be part of a group (Small, 2011). Therefore, evidence suggests that many users group and identify themselves with the phenomenon. In other instances, hashtags indicated the formation of subcommunities centered on nations and cities. There were 120 hashtags for #Pakistan, almost an equal number for the Pakistani cities of #Peshawar, #Lahore, #Karachi, #Sialkot, and #Quetta. We found 51 hashtags for #Iran and 30 hashtags for #Afghanistan. Our thematic analysis also points to the formation of an online community as a major theme that supports the identification aspect of social influence theory.

Table 3. Top 10 Most Engaging Tweets by Retweets and Likes.

User name	Tweet	Wall location	Number of retweets	Number of likes
BeautyPakistani (organization)	The Wall of Kindness in Peshawar allows people to leave spare clothing for the poor and homeless. pic.twitter.com/bOTEQNRwGB	Peshawar, Pakistan	610	563
Nytimes (newspaper)	Afghan teens created a place where people could donate clothes. Kabul wasn't ready for their "Wall of Kindness." http://nyti.ms/1q481W2	Kabul, Afghanistan	190	277
FarhanKVirk (activist)	Great work @HassanSheikhPTI for building a wall of kindness in Muzaffargarh & helping those who can't afford clothes pic.twitter.com/xFuy995V2i	Muzaffargarh, Pakistan	176	82
WAKhan_ (wall enthusiast)	Here we go. The fruit of "Wall of Kindness" in Peshawar Need more of such walls all over Pakistan. pic.twitter.com/W8JwiPb22g	Peshawar, Pakistan	165	69
asad_choudhry1 (wall enthusiast)	Kaymu.pk is donating a tshirt to Wall of Kindness on every retweet @KaymuPk #HumPakistanipic.twitter.com/Col4dqXYF5	Rawalpindi, Pakistan	131	40
KhurramBhatti01 (political worker)	پی پی پی روٹی کپڑا مکان دینے میں ناکام، #PMLN سوشل میڈیا ٹیم حیدرآباد سندھ نے غریبوں کے لئے "دیوار مہربانی" بنا ڈالی 3pic.twitter.com/tNFw0Wxde	Hyderabad, Pakistan	122	138
ArybaJB (wall enthusiast)	#WallOfKindness in Rawalpindi is located at the Siddiqui chowk on Saidpur Road! Donate if you can :) pic.twitter.com/YHNfAogJxn	Rawalpindi, Pakistan	99	114
NadeemAkhtarSo1 (journalist)	LARKANA: A person hanging clothes on "Wall of Kindness"(Diwar-e-Mehrban) to facilitate the poor segment of the society pic.twitter.com/TtRj1vuzYV	Larkana, Pakistan	95	176
AmirMateen2 (journalist)	Wall of kindness: great effort to help those who need clothing. Pl donate spare clothes. Hayatabad phase 3 Peshawar pic.twitter.com/pj76xtUz54	Peshawar, Pakistan	90	117
PressTV (media organization)	Iranians make "Wall of Kindness" where people leave their extra clothes and those in need take whatever they need! pic.twitter.com/FOG6I2Md67	Tehran, Iran	86	68

In reference to RQ2c, about evidence of internalization, we found some overt expressions of the belief system to indicate adoption of the Wall of Kindness. Our content analysis revealed that 2.2% of the tweets mentioned religious messages to support the Wall of Kindness phenomenon (see Table 1). We coded for explicit words that are commonly associated with Islam: *Islam*, *Allah*, *Insh'Allah*, *Mash'Allah*, and *Alhamdulillah*. However, we did not code for implicit words that could be identified with religious messages. A vast majority of tweets may have had religious motives; however, this study's research method limits our ability to answer this question beyond finding mention of a religious message. Given the facts that these three countries are dominantly Muslim and that charity is highly encouraged among them, groups and communities were formed on the basis of ideological affinity that facilitated internalization (Varnali & Gorgulu, 2015), and we believe that the Wall of Kindness phenomenon manifests the social influence that leads to the success of the charity initiative.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that tweeting about the Wall of Kindness offered advantages such as building an online community centered on shared interest in promoting charity. Several valuable results shed light on the use of Twitter for charitable sharing around shared interests. In line with the social influence theory (Kelman, 1958), compliance and identification processes were at play for the Wall of Kindness.

Information sharing is established as one of the significant functions of Twitter and as the dominant theme that emerged from the analysis in this study. People use Twitter not only to share information, seek information, and talk about their daily activities but to connect with those who have similar intentions (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007). In fact, it was the informative and emotional messages in this study that were retweeted the most.

Individuals derive sharing motivations from diverse sources. People may give charity for religious reasons, while others may be motivated by altruistic purposes. As Price (1975) stated, "sharing is expressed in ethical systems, in religions, and in many social forms and rituals" (p. 6). In other instances, some might give charity for the prestige associated with giving (Harbaugh, 1998). Individuals also engage in charitable giving for gaining self-esteem, reciprocity, establishing goodwill, and so on (Dawson, 1998).

Encouraging donations emerged as an important theme in the tweets, which we believe inspired others to action. Our analysis also revealed that religion played a role in the spread of the initiative. This was also evident from some of the images shared in the tweets, which depicted Islamic religious inscriptions encouraging people to be more charitable and receive rewards in the Hereafter. Especially in the region where the Islamic republics of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran are situated, charity may have a greater religious motivation. We argue that these shared religious norms correspond to Kelman's (1958) notion of internalization, whereby there may have been a realization that individuals shared a common goal. However, further research is needed to clearly establish religious motivations for sharing.

Sharing information about the charity initiative may have caused the diffusion of information. The retweet and follower functions on Twitter are key mechanisms for the diffusion and dissemination of

information (Tonkin, Pfeiffer, & Tourte, 2012). Similarly, Myrick et al. (2016) found that hashtags help form communities of interest and amplify content's reach. Thus, we believe that the hashtag also played an important role in popularizing and diffusing information about the Wall of Kindness. The use of hashtags corresponds to Kelman's (1958) notion of identification, whereby individuals identify with other users based on national origin as well as common goals and interests.

Online communities centered on a connection toward other members often create and use shared symbols and language (e.g., hashtags), maintain social roles (e.g., helping the poor), enact rituals (e.g., charitable giving), and follow norms of interaction (e.g., encouraging others toward action) (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Previous studies, such as Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002), state that virtual communities have few characteristics in common. They state that "most virtual communities are organized around some distinct interest, which to a lesser or greater extent provides its *raison d'être*" (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002, p. 5). Furthermore, Tonkin, Pfeiffer, and Tourte (2012) found that people support and retweet messages that support their beliefs. This way they form a community around the same belief and interest.

We found ample evidence of online community building and a shared sense of identity. A Twitter user, for example, stated: "Wall of kindness is the culture of Balkhian" (a province in Afghanistan) (Twitter, 2016). These types of messages not only highlight the role of community building but create a sense of identity among Twitter users. Previous studies have examined the role of social media platforms in building communities (Hightow-Weidman et al., 2015; Le Duc, 2016; Sobré-Denton, 2016). However, the relationship between online community building and real-world community building is not fully understood. More qualitative and quantitative research is needed to explore this in depth.

The spread of this trend, especially in the three countries, could be attributed to the notion that sharing is a "culturally learned behavior" (Belk, 2007, p. 130), hinging on language similarity and common religion. This is evident from the data analysis, because there was a significant amount of activity surrounding the hashtags #wallofkindness and #دیوار مهربانی (*Deewar-e-Mehrabani*), and such walls did emerge in various cities across the three countries and beyond under the same name. The Persian and Urdu languages share the Persio-Arabic script, and it may be argued that language similarity is a reason that the Wall of Kindness phenomenon spread rapidly from Iran to Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Persian words for Wall of Kindness, *Deewar-e-Mehrabani*, resonate as strongly with Urdu speakers in Pakistan as they do for Farsi speakers in both Iran and Afghanistan. In the future, we would like to gather and evaluate tweets in Farsi to better understand such initiatives in an important local language.

Research has shown that the Internet is a powerful medium that has the potential to lessen social inequality, create linkages between people, and enhance opportunities for development (Norris, 2001). The digital divide may be viewed in terms of physical access (Hargittai, 2001) and skills that lead to collaboration (Khan, Wohn, & Ellison, 2014). It is understandable that individuals tweeting about the Wall of Kindness held a privileged position in society simply because they had access to the Internet. The digital divide is quite pronounced in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, implying that the promotion of the Wall of Kindness initiative might be limited to the circle of educated and privileged individuals.

The use of social media by celebrities has proven to be a powerful tool to promote charitable causes (Bennett, 2014). Social media celebrity and influencer networks are effective in eliciting positive responses for causes and further inspire fans to action. The tweeting of the Wall of Kindness initiative fueled interest in charity and sharing. Our data show that major politicians, celebrities, and media organizations created the desired interest in promoting the Wall of Kindness in the three countries. Table 2 depicts the prominent individuals and organizations that tweeted about the charity initiative.

The Wall of Kindness initiative was primarily fueled by online sharing because of social media's fast-paced communication, its cost-effective nature, and its previous effective use by advocacy groups in promoting civic engagement and collective action (Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012; Ozdemir, 2012). The dragonfly effect model by Aaker and Smith (2010) also helps us understand how "small acts can create big change" (p. 32), as is evident from the popularity of Wall of Kindness. The Wall of Kindness made it easier for people to donate clothes and other items and in a way that made it more dignified to receive charity.

Conclusion

This study marks one of the first attempts to study the Wall of Kindness sharing and charity phenomenon that spread in various countries. Recently, there has been an increase in social media-driven fundraising such as crowdfunding and impulse donating (Saxton & Wang, 2014). Nonprofit organizations and individuals have utilized social media for engaging the community for fundraising efforts.

Our findings begin to illuminate how the Wall of Kindness charity initiative led to the creation of Walls of Kindness in three major countries; however, keeping in mind the exploratory nature of this study, it is difficult to know exactly how the charity initiative spread from one country to another and what motivated individuals to be part of this community. Future research can provide insight into how ideas spread within networks and why they take hold in certain countries more than in others. Techniques such as social network analysis can provide insight into the development and spread of ideas in networks.

The purpose of this study was to discover how sharing and charity manifests itself in different forms and how social media can play a role in promoting charitable activities in the physical world. Sharing became much more than a simple exchange of information as it facilitated the formation of an online community around a common cause, encouraged donations, and inspired further action such that the idea spread from one country to another.

Overall, this study extends work on textual analysis through the analysis of tweets, their content, and Twitter profiles. We have learned that information is shared to inspire others to positive action and maintain the momentum by encouraging donations. Such endeavors are well applicable in other scenarios around the world where human altruistic motivations can be channeled toward productive efforts. Future work can include Farsi social media content and build upon this study to discover motivations for sharing behaviors in similar contexts. Researchers can also delve into studying the continuity of the Wall of Kindness phenomenon and better understand through interviews and survey methods how and why individuals contributed for the cause of charity.

Although sharing has been explored on social media, researchers still aim to explore how the act of sharing online influences people's off-line practices and encourages them to donate, help other people in need, and create social change. Literature on social media use for charity, donation, and social change is especially scant for Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, and this study is an attempt to fill that gap.

This research provides a foundation for future scholarship and an understanding about the spread of information and sharing from the digital to the physical realm. This study is significant because the phenomenon being studied, if replicated, has global implications for advancing the lives of the less fortunate in the global South and could be used as a framework for social change intervention.

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Appendix: Screenshots of Notable Twitter Posts About the Wall of Kindness.

 **Zoni Khan**
@zonikhaan Follow

A brilliant initiative! #WallofKindness reaches #Quetta

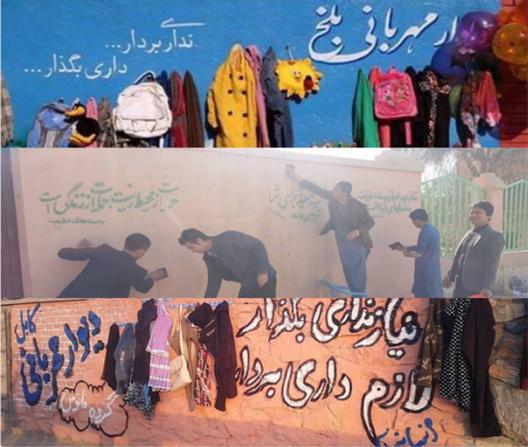


8:21 AM - 15 Feb 2016

4 Retweets 5 Likes

 **Wadsamnews**
@Wadsamnews Follow

Wall of kindness in Kabul and Mazar cities of Afghanistan. #wallofkindness #Afghanistan #kabul #mazar



6:12 PM - 27 Feb 2016

3 Retweets 3 Likes

 **Press TV**
@PressTV Follow

#Iranian trend becomes global!!! #Chinese copy #Iran's Wall of Kindness!

#Wallofkindness



10:32 PM - 29 Jan 2016

51 Retweets 61 Likes

 **Amir Mateen**
@AmirMateen2 Follow

#WallOfKindness in Sahiwal. This is what we are and this is how we want Pakistan to be portrayed. Helping each other



3:15 AM - 19 Feb 2016

36 Retweets 72 Likes

TakePart @TakePart Follow

Known as the [#WallOfKindness](#), free clothing racks have started popping up across Iran bit.ly/1OwacXV



8:02 PM - 15 Jan 2016

20 Retweets 22 Likes

Asim Khan @AsimKhanPTI Follow

Wall of Kindness

Great to see this in Bannu as well. [#WallofKindness](#)



3:29 PM - 13 Feb 2016

40 Retweets 45 Likes

H Tee Kay @EventsTeek Follow

My friend's successful '[#WallOfKindness](#)' in [#KARACHI](#)



11:29 PM - 4 Feb 2016

2 Retweets 3 Likes

1TVNewsAF @1TVNewsAF Follow

Afghanistan Pashto News 20.2.2016 پښتو خبرونه youtu.be/FmInkWf2hvw



11:57 PM - 20 Feb 2016

1 Retweet 15 Likes