



Women's Activism and Social Media: An Exploration of the Intersection of Technology and Social Change in the Context of the IAC Movement

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Abstract:

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool in mobilizing support, creating awareness, and fostering collective action in social movements. This paper examines the role and use of social media in social movements with a special emphasis on women's activism and the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement. The study explores how digital platforms amplify voices, foster engagement, and bridge geographical barriers. Through case studies of prominent women's activism in India and the IAC movement, this paper analyses the strengths, limitations, and societal impacts of social media in enabling grassroots activism. Recommendations are proposed for harnessing the potential of social media in future social movements while addressing associated challenges.

Keywords: *Social movement, Women's activism, India Against movement, Awareness*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, social movements have increasingly relied on digital technologies to organize, communicate, and advocate for change. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have democratized communication by providing accessible tools for individuals to mobilize communities and spread awareness. These platforms have been especially significant in contexts where traditional forms of media are controlled, biased, or inaccessible. This paper investigates the multifaceted role of social media in contemporary social movements, focusing on women's activism and the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement, two powerful examples of grassroots mobilization in India. In this essay, mass movements that have centred on either calling for legislation or demonstrating against particular policy-related issues are referred to as social movements; as a result, the essay concentrates on the changes in politics and governance. Some of the social movements discussed here demonstrate the actual reality of the virtual network society as well as the mobilizing potential of online communication. Social movements have emerged as the most notable aspect of the current history of post-social media human society worldwide, both in terms of their frequency, mobilization, popularity, and impact. On the one hand, social media has been the most hybrid product of the internet to date, combining its distinctive features as mass media and communication technology. These current mass movements are exceptional in their mobilizing mainly because of social media. The majority of the newfound interest in revisiting the study of novel social network types and the social movements that come from them is due to these distinctive characteristics.

This essay examines mass movement in a networked world that has changed. Thus, democracy is both essential to and problematic for communication. As a communication mechanism between networks of actors, this study outlines some of the changes in policymaking processes. Some of the topics that have been studied in this paper include the impact of social media on mass mobilization, the subsequent impact of such mobilization on the efficacy and impact of social movements, and the changes in general governance and policymaking processes. This paper explores the dynamics of the correlation between these themes within the context of the democratic politics of India through a cross-case analysis. Therefore, the main research topic here is how to describe the changes taking place in the policy-making processes and whether it is feasible to link these changes to the existence of social media and the internet. By addressing both the opportunities and challenges presented by these platforms, this study highlights their dual potential as tools for empowerment and sources of new forms of inequality or misinformation.

2. Literature Review

The researcher chooses the example and research site for this study by combining Habermas's notion of NET (here referring to the internet) with the fundamental idea of social networking. The idea of social networking states that social capital is the main emphasis of social networking, whether it takes place in person or online. Social capital is the aggregation of actual and virtual resources an individual or group attains via networks built from meeting other people or groups. The underlying principle of social capital is that in extending one's social network, a person or group then can draw on resources that people or groups in their network possess or can access. These resources can vary from information to relationships with other people; from a group's perspective, resources increase the capacity to organize members across organizations or causes (Analysing Social Media Momentum Report 2012: 2)

The public sphere being the communication channel of civil society is equated with media and in this study, it is equated with internet media. Thus, "the internet, by providing spaces for expressing views and debate on common matters, shifts politics towards more discursive and linguistic forms" (Sassi 2001: 90-91). Since policy outcomes ultimately depend on the degree of influence the stakeholders could have based on their level and scope of participation, the researcher uses this framework of analysis to choose three civil society movements as cases that provide the chance to examine the potential relationship between internet and social media use and formal policy outcomes.

The intersection of social media and social movements has been a topic of growing interest among scholars. Key areas of investigation include:

1. **Amplification of Marginalized Voices:** Studies (e.g., Castells, 2012) discuss how social media enables marginalized groups to find platforms for expression.
2. **Grassroots Mobilization:** Social media's ability to foster real-time communication and coordination is pivotal (Tufekci, 2017).
3. **Challenges and Risks:** While digital platforms offer unprecedented outreach, challenges such as misinformation, trolling, and surveillance complicate activism (Morozov, 2011).
4. **Gender and Social-Media:** Research (Dutta, 2019) shows that social media has provided a medium for women to challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for gender equality.
5. These studies provide a theoretical framework for analysing the specific cases of women's activism and the IAC movement.

3. Methodology

This paper is based on secondary data and we have used the method of content analysis for the collection of secondary data.

4. Women's Activism Movements in India

India has witnessed a surge in women-led movements leveraging social media. Prominent examples include:

1. **#MeTooIndia:** social media became a tool for survivors of sexual harassment to share their stories, fostering a sense of solidarity and accountability.
2. **Pinjra Tod:** A movement against restrictive hostel rules for women, Pinjra Tod used Facebook and Twitter to organize protests and discussions.
3. **Nirbhaya Movement:** This incident evoked mass protest by feminist women organizations, students and middle-class men and women in Delhi as well as other parts of country.
4. **#BlackDayForDoctors:** The digital uproar in Kolkata following the assault of a junior doctor, which culminated in protests across medical fraternities nationwide.

Digital platforms provide accessibility to varied groups, allowing voices from remote areas and underrepresented communities to converge. The tools employed include:

- **Hashtags and Social Media Posts:** To create virality and unified messaging.
- **Online Petitions:** Platforms like Change.org to pressure policymakers.
- **Live Streams and Citizen Journalism:** Ensuring the visibility of on-ground protests and narratives ignored by mainstream media.

Through these cases, it is evident that social media serves as a platform for awareness, advocacy, and collective action, though it also exposes women activists to online harassment and abuse. Social media platforms played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion and organizing protests. Hashtags demanding justice for the victim trended nationwide, and platforms were used to coordinate strikes and marches. However, there was a disturbing spike in online searches for alleged footage of the crime, reflecting a darker side of digital engagement.

5. India Against Corruption Movement

5.1 Background and Brief Outline of the Movement

In its 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International gave India a score of 3.1, placing it 95th out of 182. Furthermore, over 50% of Indian respondents admitted to paying bribes to obtain basic public services, according to research by Transparency International. This suggests a rather high level of genuine corruption. More recent interest in reducing corruption was sparked by several well-reported frauds involving the Indian Premier League, the Commonwealth Games, and the telecom sector. A draft Lokpal bill was created by the Indian government in 2010 in response to significant corruption scandals. A government officer or agency that looks into individual complaints against public authorities is known as a "Lokpal" (ombudsman). Since the proposed measure excluded the prime minister, members of Parliament, and cabinet ministers, many residents and social activists viewed it as weak.

Based on Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent teachings, social activist Anna Hazare founded the India Against Corruption (IAC) anti-corruption movement in April 2011 to raise awareness of the numerous scams. This movement's goal was to pressure the Indian government into enacting laws that would protect whistleblowers, lessen corruption-related complaints, and discourage corruption. A draft of the Lokpal bill was created by the government in 2010. Social activists wrote their bill after claiming it was insufficiently tough. India Against Corruption (IAC) was formed to lead the fight against corruption.

Renowned social activist Anna Hazare embarked on a hunger strike on April 5, 2011, to compel the Indian government into passing a robust anti-corruption law as outlined in the Jan Lokpal Bill. Approximately five million people were mobilized during the five-day Hazare campaign, primarily via online social

networking sites. The government had consented to present the Lokpal, or ombudsman bill, to parliament. However, the Rajya Sabha lacks a majority, hence the bill has not yet become law.

6. Structural Element

6.1 Strategies

To mobilize the public as quickly as possible, the anticorruption movement's organizers and supporters made extensive use of social media and the Internet. Using the combined enhanced influence of both internet platforms and traditional mass media, the majority of the media strategies sought to attract as much attention as possible. A dedicated team of information technology experts ran IAC's main website along with fourteen city-centric websites round-the-clock. To generate excitement throughout the world, they also submitted videos online and watched TV networks. Soon after Hazare was detained, another team made sure that the most recent information on him was shared on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Mass public gatherings, jail bharo22, and hunger strikes all served to put pressure on the administration. The creation of catchphrases such as "I am Anna" caused supporters to further internalize the fight for anti-graft legislation.

6.2 Goal Attainment

Mobilization: When calls for a robust anti-corruption Lokpal Bill first arose in early 2011, marches were staged around Indian towns, and a large event was conducted in New Delhi. However, Anna Hazare began a hunger strike on April 5, 2011, after discussions between her civil society organizations and the Indian government failed to produce an agreement on the bill's design. Protest marches in favor of Hazare were held nationwide as a result of the fasting, which also put pressure on the administration. Social media was utilized by supporters and organizers of the anti-corruption campaign to spread the word about the fast. As a result, a large number of individuals were mobilized to support and show solidarity with the India Against Corruption Movement via social media and the internet.

Fostering deliberation: As previously stated, the deliberation process also continued to be an ongoing one without distinct stages of articulation and formulation of the Lokpal bill drafting in 2011, with stakeholders and their supporters being mobilized in various ways at various points in time, most notably during the parliamentary sessions and then intermittently throughout the process until the movement's conclusion. During the IAC movement, the internet and social media greatly facilitated the ongoing integration of people's thoughts and recommendations as well as conversations among expert groups. There was a high level of awareness regarding the areas of contention among the stakeholders as a result of the public discussions and the process, which was primarily covered by the media. However, the process of reaching a consensus was completely undermined due to the excessive attention that was drawn from online support-gathering and the "action-reaction" drama between the government and the CSO that was constantly covered by the media.

Policy outcome: The government's most recent version of the law, which Hazare believed was still too weak, was approved by the lower house of Parliament, the Lok Sabha, on December 27, 2011. With a sharp decline in the number of supporters, he launched another hunger strike in Mumbai to protest the government's progress on the weaker Lokpal bill. Shortly after the Lok Sabha approved a weakened version of the Lokpal bill—which was never approved by the Rajya Sabha, India's upper house of parliament—Hazare called off his third hunger strike, citing health concerns.

The India Against Corruption movement (2011–2012) epitomized the use of social media in large-scale mobilization. Key features include:

1. **Platform for Awareness:** social media disseminated information about corruption and proposed the Jan Lokpal Bill.
2. **Youth Engagement:** Platforms like Facebook and YouTube attracted young participants, creating a groundswell of support.

3.Coordination and Real-time Updates: Tools such as Twitter were used to share updates about rallies and speeches.

Despite its successes, the movement faced criticisms for oversimplifying complex issues and relying excessively on digital platforms, which excluded populations without internet access.

6.3 Discussion

The two social movements examined in the two case studies demonstrate the disparities in internet and social media usage. This section attempts to investigate the potential for inferential correlation between the dependent variable of goal attainment and the independent variable of internet and social media use. The Kolkata High Court moved the matter to the Central Bureau of Probe (CBI) to guarantee impartiality because of issues with the initial probe. The establishment of a nationwide task force to enhance physician safety and heightened the government-announced security measures at state-run hospitals. The necessity for systemic changes to safeguard women in public and professional settings has been highlighted by this sad incident, which has rekindled conversations about women's safety in India. Numerous social media hashtag campaigns and outpourings of support increased attention to the Kolkata case and sped up changes to the law and democracy in general.

Both physical and online mobilization strategies were widely used in the IAC movement. Online interactions and real-world behaviours frequently impact one another. There were very few distinct phases of formulation and articulation that had an impact on the corresponding mobilization. Rather, there was constant mobilization to maintain the growth of the support base regardless of the necessity of the legislative process. Regardless of the degree of experience or skill set needed to contribute to the drafting process, the movement's mobilization sought to include the broadest possible base of support using a variety of communication channels, particularly the digital medium.

Social media-created support networks for social movements provide stakeholders with more recent incentives to become involved. By participating, protesters demonstrate their solidarity, which benefits the organizers' legitimacy and trustworthiness. The government and other impacted parties join or engage in discourse mostly because they are compelled to do so due to mounting public pressure. Just as the internet and social media positively create conditions for responsiveness, it also undermines the complexities of the processes of policymaking by treating it with the same expectation of instant response as everything else on the internet gets treated with. Social media and the internet have made it possible for people from all walks of life to get involved in social movements. With too much consultation, this could have an impact on the process's overall quality. Additionally, the volume of comments adds to the effort of working groups that are already overburdened. On-site engagement has begun to be substantially complemented by the sense of inclusivity that remote participation through digital media has created.

Social movements are set up to call for modifications to laws and policies. The informality of interaction provided by the internet and social media frequently undermines the complexity of such procedures, which include adopting laws, policies, and changes to existing ones.

To use online open consultations, the norms of interaction would need to be balanced. Social media and the internet often draw too much attention to social movement concerns, to the point where consultative groups feel compelled to maintain their divisive stances to retain the support of the people whose interests they serve. As a result, in these public decision-making processes, listening to one another's concerns and reaching a consensus or resolving conflicts suffer. There is mistrust among the stakeholders as a result of an abundance of viewpoints and unchecked emotional and behavioural expression. It becomes more

difficult to distinguish between the technical and strategic facets of decision-making when open platforms, particularly social media, are used in the consultation process. There is evidence to suggest that the majority of laws and policies that have sparked social movements are frequently intended to alter the balance of power. Knowledge has been generated as a result of social movements' open participation procedures. Bringing together a variety of specialists, skills, and viewpoints to encourage public thought on certain topics helps build a body of knowledge that can guide well-informed decision-making. Social media has proven to be a double-edged sword. While it democratizes activism, fostering inclusivity and rapid mobilization, it also brings challenges such as digital divides, online abuse, and state surveillance. This discussion unpacks the dichotomies inherent in using social media for activism, highlighting lessons from women's movements and the IAC campaign.

6.4 Impacts

- 1. Empowerment:** Social media has empowered marginalized groups by amplifying their voices and enabling advocacy.
- 2. Policy Influence:** Movements have succeeded in pushing legislative and societal changes, as seen in #MeToo's impact on workplace harassment policies.
- 3. Limitations:** Over-reliance on digital platforms can alienate those without internet access, perpetuating inequalities.

6.5 Recommendations

- 1. Digital Literacy Campaigns:** Promote inclusivity by training marginalized groups in digital literacy.
- 2. Ethical Usage:** Develop guidelines to minimize misinformation and trolling in social movements.
- 3. Hybrid Strategies:** Combine online and offline methods to ensure comprehensive participation.
- 4. Robust Legal Frameworks:** Strengthen laws addressing online abuse and cyber-harassment.

7. Conclusion

Social media and the internet have given social movements new vigor and paved the way for an inclusive, collaborative, and open governing style. However, such an open consultation procedure could serve as a means of gaining government backing and credibility in terms of transparency. Still, it could also serve as a cover for delaying a process that requires prompt resolution. This necessitates increased accountability on the part of the populace to cultivate the aptitude and capacity to invest time in studied inputs, as well as a persistent readiness and promptness to participate and maintain an open mind to the opinions of others. Based on the above analysis, it could be said that the consultative process of policy-making has been introduced to the citizens of India. With the growing impact of communication technology, it is only going to get better. In addition to making it easier, more efficient, and more effective to plan social movements, the internet, and social media have brought about the development of deliberative processes that educate impacted citizens and allow for the integration of expertise at different levels while continuing to move in the direction of the intended result. The deliberative aspects of the social movements in India are at an experimental stage and there are various aspects in which a position of balance and compromise needs to be found to have meaningful outcomes, not just in terms of policy outcome but in ensuring democratic safeguards. Therefore, the optimism surrounding the use of social media and the internet must be approached cautiously in terms of the skill development needed for the citizens to use these tools with increased knowledge and responsibility, just as there is a need for structure in the recently developed methods of governance and policy-making.

Social media has revolutionized the way social movements operate, providing tools for amplification, engagement, and organization. While the case studies of women's activism and the India Against Corruption movement demonstrate its transformative potential, they also underscore the challenges of

accessibility and misuse. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions and thoughtful strategies, social media can continue to catalyse meaningful societal change.

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