

Digital Activism in India: A Study on Facebook

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Abstract

Ever since the internet has penetrated in our society, people have been using it in many ways. One of such use of the Internet, that has grown rapidly within the last decade, is the use of internet for mass mobilization or activism. A Digital Activism campaign is "an organised public effort, making collective claims on a target authority, in which civic initiators, or supporters use digital media to accomplish their cause". Internet can be used in a variety of ways to create activism, such as by e-mailing petitions perusing people to join the campaigns, making social groups, creating awareness about the issue or the cause on the internet, use of hashtags and other ways. This study analysis the various types of digital activism on current issues appearing on the Facebook. For this purpose content analysis is being adopted as a research methodology with an objective to analyse the occurrences, types and functions of digital activism in India. Also, the study identified the nature and functions of the posts and comments on digital activism issues on Facebook. The result reveals that 'Slacktivism' is the most popular form of digital activism on Facebook in India.

Keywords: *Digital Activism, Facebook, Campaigns, Slacktivism, Hashtags.*

Introduction

Activism' is the actions of a group of like-minded individuals coming together to change the status quo, advocating for a cause, whether local or global, and whether progressive or not (Cammaerts, 2007; Kahn and Kellner, 2004;

Lomicky and Hogg, 2010). Whether a long-term social movement or an outburst of action, successful mobilizations depend on the degree of a group's common interests and shared identity, its available resources, its political power, its opportunities and threats, and the level of governmental repression (Tilly, 1978).

In this Digital Era, access to and familiarity with technology have become an important resource for a successful movement (Rolfe, 2005). In India Against Corruption, what started as a massive protest organized via Facebook around the Lokpal bill issue has evolved into a more general pro-justice and anti-violence movement in the country. And since then, the trend has been set to create a Facebook page for any event that occurs or that is going to happen in the future. Activism and mobilization on Internet have become much of a fashion, with events lashed upon in the media.

The advent of social media has created more avenues for advocacy and activist groups, such as civil rights organizations, to disseminate messages that engage their allies online in encouraging them to effect social and political change, that could have a detrimental impact on the supporters of those organizations. These messages also can outline specific actions to undertake that ensure that the issues are addressed tactfully, thoughtfully, and thoroughly. Facebook and Twitter allow these organizations to communicate their messages directly to their publics across platforms in an uncontrolled environment.

Internet activism, is the use of electronic communication technologies such as social media, e-mail, and podcasts for various forms of activism to enable faster communication by citizen movements and the delivery of local information to a large audience. Internet technologies are used for cause-related fundraising, community building, lobbying, and organizing. A digital activism campaign is "an organized public effort, making collective claims on a target authority, in which civic initiators or supporters use digital media."

When Nisha Susan launched, in 2009, the Pink Chaddi campaign, the 'ICT for Revolution'-buzz finally seemed to have reached India also. Phenomenally successful in terms of the attention it generated for the issue it sought to address, the campaign sought to protest in a humorous fashion against attacks on women pub-goers in Karnataka by Hindu right-wing elements. In only a matter of weeks, the Facebook group associated with the campaign – 'The Consortium of Pub-going, Loose and Forward Women' – gathered tens of thousands of members. Ultimately killed off when Susan's Facebook account

was cracked by opponents, the campaign was perhaps the singular most successful account of digital activism in India so far, and an impressive one by all measures.

This research paper studies the diverse content on types, functions and thematic frames of posts and comments made on Facebook on various digital activism issues through content analysis technique of media research, to gauge the impact of the content on netzines. Internet activism has had the effect of causing increased collective action among people, as found by Postmes and Brunsting (2002), who discovered a tendency among internet users to rely on internalized group memberships and social identities in order to achieve social involvement online.

The internet's impact on social movements

Several scholars have in recent years applied social movement theory to studies of Internet-based grassroots campaigning. Bevington and Dixon (2005) ask whether social movement theory is relevant for the actors being studied and conclude: "we see a promising, emerging movement-relevant approach, one based on direct, dynamic engagement with the concerns and questions of movements themselves" (p. 203).

According to a 2009 survey by DigiActive, social network sites (SNS) are the most common entrance to online activism, despite the fact that SNS were not created with activism in mind (Brodock et al., 2009). Considering that much still must be learned about how the internet is impacting mobilization (Rolfe, 2005; Wojcieszak, 2009), this study is important for exploring what SNS, particularly Facebook, mean for social movements (Cleaver, 1998; Diani, 2000).

Scholars tend to view the internet's role in social movements as two-fold: the internet can facilitate traditional offline activism, enhancing a movement's existing repertoire by adding email campaigns, online petitions and even virtual sit-ins to activists' existing toolbox (Castells, 2001; Juris, 2005), or it actually can create new forms of activism and resistance (Cardoso and Pereira Neto, 2004; Rolfe, 2005; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2009). When it comes to supporting traditional techniques of social movements, whether protests or signature drives, the internet, unlike any other medium, allows for fast, easy and cheap transnational action not limited by time, space or distance (Castells, 2001; Juris, 2005; Ribeiro, 1998).

Van de Donk et al. (2004) argued that the internet will complement, not replace, existing social movement tactics. In fact, it is the widely-lauded simplicity of online activism that scholars have suggested could undercut a movement's value, creating a half-hearted, meaningless activism, or 'slacktivism' (Morozov, 2009a; Van de Donk et al., 2004).

Categories of Activism

Of the various types of activism, that happens over the internet, five popularly occurring activism are identified as- Hashtag Activism, Hacktivism, Slacktivism, Clicktivism, and Video Activism. All others were categorized into the section of Others.

- **Hashtag Activism:** Hashtag activism is the use of hashtags for activist purposes. Its use has been associated with the 2014 Chibok kidnapping, with hopes that it would help keep the story in the news and raise international attention.
- **Slacktivism:** A form of activism where the activism does not simply happen on the Internet, but also in the real world.
- **Clicktivism:** According to techopedia, clicktivism is a controversial form of digital activism. Opponents believe that clicktivism reduces activism to a mere mouse-click, yielding numbers with little or no real engagement or commitment to the cause.
- **Hacktivism:** In Digital activism, hacktivism is the subversive use of computers and computer networks to promote a political agenda.
- **Video activism:** Video activism is the use of videos, live streaming and other techniques for activism purposes. It is often employed by grassroots activists and to spread information

Specific Objectives of the study

- To analyze the occurrences and functions of types of Digital Activism in India.
- To study the nature and functions of posts and comments on digital activism.

Methodology

The researcher has adopted Content Analysis as a technique to analyse the

content artefacts for this study to understand and study various social issues used for internet activism. Content Analysis is described as the scientific study of content of communication.

Sampling process: A sample design is a definite plan for obtaining a sample from a given population (Kothari, 1988). Sample constitutes a certain portion of the population or universe.

For the research purpose, the researcher has chosen the activism issues for the time period of one year i.e. from February 2016 to February 2017. All the activism issues that were strolling on Facebook were observed, and were then classified into several categories. The researcher has chosen five major categories, which has contributed a lot to activism over Facebook. These categories are Gender Issues, Political Issues, Social Issues, Caste/ Class Issues and Others. For analysis purpose, the researcher took two recent activism cases for each issue, which makes a total of ten activism cases. These issues are identified as Bangalore molestation, Gurmehar Kaur, Rohit Vemula and Tina Dabi issue, Jaylalita, Modi/ Kejriwal issue, Jihad and Ramjas issue, Demonetization and Swatchh Bharat Abhiyan. These cases are selected on the basis of the Lottery method.

The Lottery Method is one of the methods of Simple Random Sampling method of Probability sampling. The main benefit of the simple random sample is that each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen. Here, each member or item of the population at hand is assigned a unique number. The numbers are then thoroughly mixed, like if you put them in a bowl or jar and shook it. Then, without looking, the researcher selects n numbers.

For each of the activism case, the researcher selected two Facebook pages, on the basis of popularity i.e. the two pages which have the maximum number of likes. These pages have been analysed separately using a Code book. To know the 'type of content' provided in these pages, the researcher began to analyse the ten beginning posts of each page, in all 200 posts on these issues are analysed. These posts have been analysed on a variety of criteria such as likes, comments, shares, nature, function etc.

Further, ten beginning comments on each post have also been analysed making it 2000 comments, so that the researcher can gauge out the impact of each post, and through it, the impact of the activism on the people. The comments on each post came directly from the people, from various different

parts of the country.

Coding: In social science, coding is an analytical process in which data, in both quantitative form or qualitative is categorized to facilitate analysis. The SPSS software is used for coding purpose and the data is analysed on the basis of descriptive statistics (percentage basis).

Unit of Analysis: The unit of analysis is the major entity that is being analyzed in a study. It is the 'what' or 'who' that is being studied. In social science research, typical units of analysis include groups, social organizations and social artifacts. For this research, unit of analysis is categorized as internet activism issues, types of activism, functions of activism, nature of posts, etc.

Variables of analysis: A variable is any entity that can take on different values. Anything that can vary can be considered a variable. Variables aren't always 'quantitative' or numerical. It can be qualitative as well. For the purpose of this research, variables of analysis are identified for example for unit types of activism, variables are categorised as Hashtag activism, Hacktivism, Slacktivism, Clicktivism, Video activism and others

Data Analysis

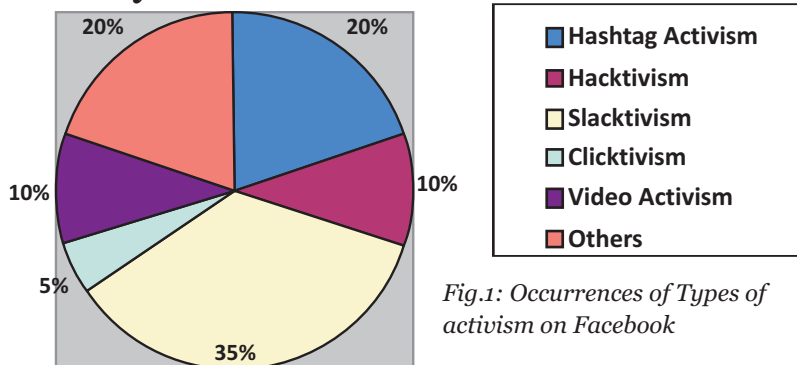


Fig.1: Occurrences of Types of activism on Facebook

Figure 1 depicts the occurrences of types of activism over Facebook in India. Slacktivism accounts for nearly 35 percent of the total, followed by Hashtag Activism and other types of activism i.e. 20 percent each. The other forms include Hacktivism and Video activism accounts for 10 percent respectively in each category. However, least occurred form of activism measured is clicktivism (5%). This indicates that most popularly used digital activism form in India is Slacktivism and least popular is Clicktivism.

Table.1: Digital Activism Issues and its Functions

DIGITAL ACTIVISM ISSUES	FUNCTIONS OF ACTIVISM		
	Awareness/ Advocacy	Organisation/ Mobilization	Action/ Reaction
GENDER ISSUES	93.3%	6.7%	0%
CASTE/CLASS ISSUES	17.6%	82.4%	0%
POLITICAL ISSUES	40.4%	59.6%	0%
SOCIAL ISSUES	0%	34.5%	65.5%
OTHER ISSUES	100%	0%	0%

Table 1, measures the types of activism and its functions. The three functions of Activism are classified (Sandor Vegh) as Awareness/ Advocacy, Organization/ Mobilization and Action/ Reaction. Among all, the most common function of a majority of the activism issues, is Awareness or Advocacy. A little more than half (55%) of the issues analyzed create awareness or advocacy among netzines. Although, the other 30 percent of the activism issues have the function of organization or mobilization of the people towards the cause. Only 15% of the total activism issues are raised for performing any action or as a reaction of something.

Various digital activism issues have various functions as shown in table 1. The major function of the gender issues is awareness with more than 93 percent incidences. The caste and class issues main function are organization/mobilization (82.4%) through digital activism. Political issues have main functions as awareness (40%) and Organization (60%). For social issues action/reaction becomes one the important function of digital activism. It is interesting to note that, other issues have focused entirely on awareness and advocacy on digital platform. This indicates that digital activism plays a major role in awareness and advocacy of various issues in India.

Table.2: Depicts the Nature of the Posts on Digital Activism on Facebook

NATURE OF POSTS	PERCENT (%)
DEROGATORY	1.5 %
OFFENSIVE	4.0 %
ACCUSING	14.0 %
THREATENING	6.5%
CALM/ PLACID	10.0%
ANGRY	15.0%
FRIENDLY	7.5%
ILLUSTRATION	18.0%
APPEALING	9.5%
SARCASTIC	9.0%
OTHERS	5.0%

Table 2 depicts the nature of the posts of various digital activism issues on Facebook. The highly recognized nature of the post is illustrations (18%). This is followed by angry and accusing posts i.e. 15 percent and 14 percent respectively. Although, some of the posts, nearly 10 percent are either calm or appealing in nature. However, it becomes imperative to highlight that derogatory (1.5%), threatening (6.5%) and offensive (4%) nature is the least accounted nature of posts on the various digital activism issues on Facebook. This indicates that digital activism is not growing because of offensive or derogatory posts in India, but users are attracted to illustrations

Table.3: Functions of the Post on Digital Activism on Facebook

FUNCTIONS OF POST	PERCENT (%)
CALL FOR ACTION	12.0%
CONVEY INFORMATION	22.0%
STATE AN OPINION	20.0%
REFERENCE PAST/ FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN A PROTEST	7.5%

SEEK INFORMATION	3.5%
SUPPORT MOVEMENT	8.0%
GENERAL ENCOURAGEMENT	13.0%
OTHERS	14.0%

Table 3 measures the functions of the post, may differ from post to post within a page. These functions are classified as Call for action, Convey information, State an opinion, Reference past/future protest, Seek information, Support movement, General encouragement and Others. It is also not necessary that the functions of the post, are the same as the functions of the activism page. A little less than half of the posts are performing the function of conveying information (22%) and stating an opinion (20%). This is followed by other functions of the general encouragement (14%) and calling for an action (12%). However, it is surprising to note that these posts marginally seek information on the various digital activism issues and the focus is more on conveying the information and stating the opinions.

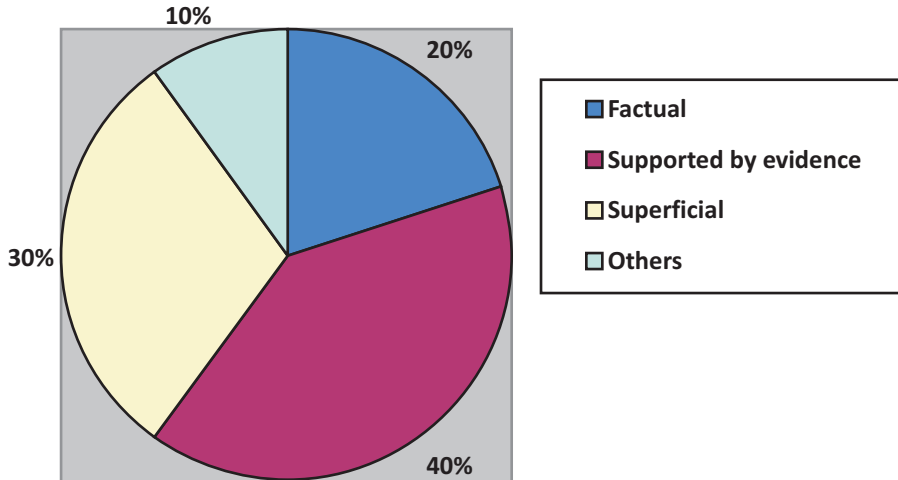


Fig.2: The credibility of information provided in the Post on Digital Activism

Figure 2 measure the credibility of information provided in the post on digital activism on Facebook. To analyze the credibility of the information provided in the post the categories are characterized as Factual, Supported by evidence,

Superficial, and Others. Of all, 40 percent of the information in the posts are supported by evidence such as videos, images, links etc., and around 20 percent of the information is factual based on statistical facts. A little more than one-fourth (30%) of the information provided in the post is superficial, with no evidence or justification of the information. Hence, impacting the reliability of the post on activism.

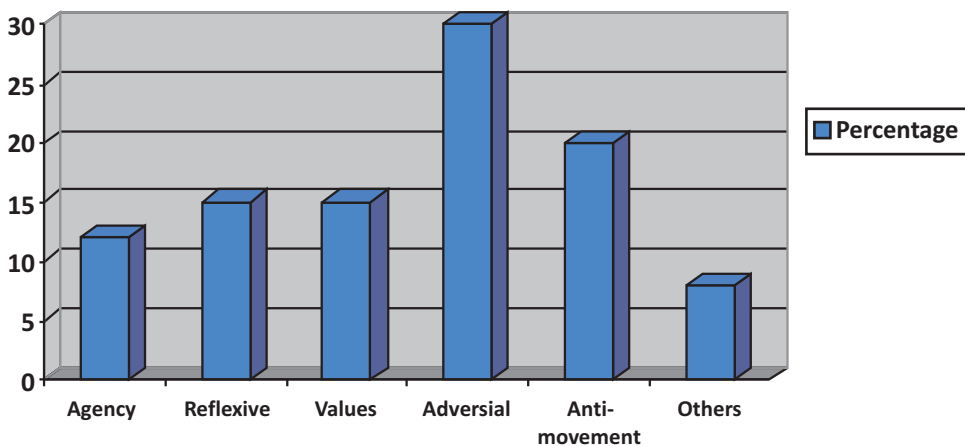


Fig.3 Thematic frames in the comments

Figure 3 shows the thematic frames in the comments of digital activism. The various thematic frames in the comments are identified as Agency (Action-related), Reflexive (media coverage, thoughtful), Values (Ideals, like justice), Adversarial (heroes versus villains), Anti- movement and Others. These frames help in determining the types of comments on the posts, and thus help in analyzing the impact of activism on the netzines in general, and the society at large. A little more than one-fourth (30%) of the issues have adversarial frames in the comments, and nearly 20 percent of the thematic frames are anti-movement. It is significant to highlight that the half of the thematic frames are adversarial or anti-movement in the entire comments. Although, values and reflexive frames are identified in 15 percent comments in each category. However, only 12 percent comment have action relation thematic frame.

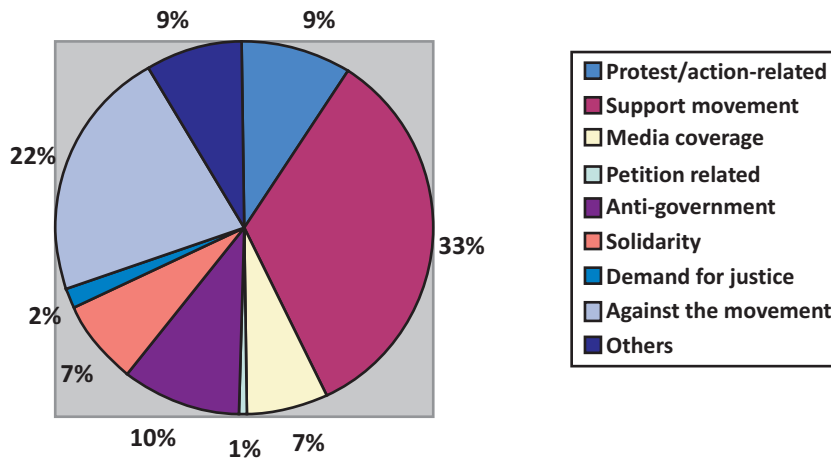


Fig.4 Depicts the Type of comments on Digital Activism Posts

Figure 4 depicts the percentage of the type of comments on digital activism posts on Facebook. The type of comments is classified as Protest/ action related, Support movement/ general encouragement, Media coverage/ article-blog links, Petition-related, Anti-president/government, Solidarity, Demand for justice, Against the movement, and Others. One-third (33.3%) of the comments supports the movements and almost 22 percent of the comments on the digital activism posts are against the movements. Although, anti-government and protest/action-related types are identified in 10 percent comments in each category respectively. It becomes imperative to note that the type of comment, demand of justice (2%) and petition related (0.6%) comments are negligibly present.

Conclusion

This research determines that how, in this techno-savvy world, people, especially the young activists, take help of social media platforms such as Facebook, to exfoliate their cause. It firmly establishes, that the impact of the activism on people is tremendous and they participate in the digital activism on various issues. Analysing Facebook content provides insight in to how users benefit from its interactive elements. Many users' comments include links to videos, photos and texts. This study explored that posts or comments has different roles, thematic frames and functions acting on upon these issues of

digital activism. The type of digital activism also plays an important function in analysing the impact and growth of these social movements in the Indian society through Facebook, for example slacktivism is the most popular form of digital activism in India. This helps in generating debate and create a sense of community and collective identity. Further, extensive research in this arena will definitely convey a better understanding of the content and its impact on the netzines.

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