



INDIA'S INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT TO UNITE NATIONS

STUDY GUIDE

COMMITTEE: INFLUENCER SUMMIT

AGENDA: THE ADVENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

INTRODUCTION

As Vikas Chawla, co-founder of Social Beat, stated, social media has become deeply ingrained in various aspects of modern life. Citizens have used the platform proactively for various purposes, such as gathering supporters, arranging protest marches, generating varied forms of content, and even securing financial aid. A glance at Facebook pages associated with Bangalore revealed numerous local groups established recently. While some focused solely on organising local protest rallies, others concentrated on distributing up-to-date information about unfolding regional developments. The widespread use of social media has empowered individuals to make their views heard louder and more effectively through increased exposure. By leveraging social networks, thousands of people can now speak far beyond their immediate surroundings to reach audiences scattered throughout India and around the globe. Social media popularity has also raised concerns about addiction, digital literacy, fake news epidemics, mass surveillance, cybersecurity threats, user engagement metrics, filter bubbles, radicalisation, echo chambers, mental health crises, and other troubling side effects.

Social Media Activism

Social media offers a unique opportunity for anyone to voice opinions, share experiences, mobilise communities, educate friends and followers, hold decision-makers accountable, amplify marginalised voices, crowdsource solutions, demand positive changes, join forces locally and globally, collaborate across barriers, stay informed about breaking news, contribute creative works or data visualisations, celebrate wins, document historical moments, and more.

Social media activism refers to using online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, etc., to raise awareness of significant social and political issues. It helps to build support, motivate action, and connect with others who feel similarly about those topics.

Social activism is like gardening in a dense forest. Just as a gardener carefully cultivates small plots of land to grow flowers, fruits, and vegetables amidst towering trees and thick foliage, social activists work tirelessly to create pockets of positive change within the intricate web of societal structures and entrenched systems of oppression. They till the soil of

justice, plant seeds of equality, water the roots of empathy, weed out prejudice, prune the branches of privilege, and harvest crops of compassion.

Social Media Activism is not different from activism; instead, it refers to all the forms of activism conducted primarily or partially on social media platforms. The distinction lies in contextualising activist practices vis-à-vis online environments versus offline ones, with both having complementary yet distinct roles depending on specific objectives, tactics, constituencies, conflicts, and impacts under consideration.

Importance of Social Media Activism

Social media activism can generate awareness about various issues, create dialogue, foster solidarity, and galvanise people into action. The power of virality allows messages and movements to spread quickly, potentially reaching large audiences and engaging previously unconnected individuals who may otherwise remain unaware or passive bystanders. This level of connectivity enables enhanced participation in public discourse, civic life, and political processes. This enables marginalised groups to have a voice in their representation and demand the changes necessary for their inclusion and empowerment. By leveraging user-generated content, hashtags, memes, videos, live streams, petitions, polls, quizzes, games, and other tools, activists can generate meaningful conversations and drive behaviour change in areas ranging from human rights to climate change to economic inequality. Yet, such influence cuts both ways: misinformation and propaganda spread as easily, undermining informed decision-making and exacerbating existing divisions. Therefore, it remains essential for society to develop digital literacy that enables responsible consumption and production of information in the age of perpetually connected media platforms. While not a panacea, mindful social media activism holds substantial promise for expanding spheres of opportunity and agency that advance democratic ideals worldwide.

Understanding its implications and potential benefits ultimately rests upon each person's willingness to participate responsibly in shaping the future of these communication networks.

Recent examples of the significance of social media activism include global mobilisations around environmental crises like climate change, The Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality, women's marches for gender equality, anti-war demonstrations opposing military intervention, disability rights campaigns promoting accessibility, the

#MeToomovement combatting sexual harassment, immigrant rights efforts protecting migrants, LGBTQ+ pride parades championing diversity, and many more causes. Online communities organise and amplify collective actions that address local, regional, national, and international concerns. Digital channels provide valuable means to raise awareness, coordinate activities, share experiences, pressure policymakers, build supportive networks, and inspire upcoming generations of changemakers—all while circumventing traditional barriers of geography, resources, or visibility. Nonetheless, these same digital platforms can contribute to distorted perceptions, polarisation, echo chambers, cyberbullying, data breaches, censorship, state surveillance, etc. Management of positives and negatives requires responsible use, critical thinking, cross-platform collaboration, and continued education. Despite some limitations, social media activism is indispensable in contemporary struggles for justice and sustainability.

Impacting Society through Social Media Activism

Imagine a dedicated environmental enthusiast whose Instagram account features daily pictures, videos, and tips promoting sustainable practices. Over time, the platform develops a devoted fan base comprising concerned citizens, eco-conscious businesses, NGOs focused on conservation efforts, experts providing educational snippets, scientists relaying research discoveries, influencers collaborating on impactful campaigns, and policymakers seeking advice or support. Despite varying backgrounds, these members actively engage with each other under one common cause. They exchange information, offer resources, debate tradeoffs, encourage action, applaud breakthroughs, and hold leaders accountable. Because of the cross-pollination facilitated by social media, local climate action initiatives receive unprecedented attention nationwide/worldwide, leading to previously unknown partnerships and collaborations among activists. As users continue to learn from and motivate each other, their collective influence bolsters environmental stewardship locally and globally. This pressures governments to consider public interests over corporate greed or political convenience.

Consider an immigrant artist navigating America's immigration policies alongside millions of similar individuals caught in legal limbo. Frustrated with media representations perpetuating negative stereotypes against Latinx folks, he creates fictional characters reflecting authentic human struggles in the United States, where these struggles are rarely depicted. After building an audience, he uses his illustrator platform as a megaphone, amplifying advocacy

efforts combating white supremacy and anti-immigrant vitriol, wherein connections formed organically attract other minority creators passionate about their respective communities.

Visualise a network of freelancers, consultants, think tankers, academics, students, activists, entrepreneurs, policymakers, data analysts, programmers etc., spanning various disciplines across borders interested in tackling human challenges together. Each member contributes specialised knowledge, skills, insights, and experience toward addressing specific issues ranging from pandemics to election tampering; from income inequality to climate resilience; from migrant justice to food security; from technological innovations to education reform. This dynamic ecosystem continuously evolves, driven by constant feedback improving its effectiveness and multiplying the benefits derived by everyone engaged. This is a powerful method to tackle the most pressing issues of our time and to build a better future for all. It's a way to foster collaboration and create positive change. It's a way to ensure our voices are heard, and our needs are met.

Slacktivism

Slacktivism refers to the practice of performing low-effort, usually symbolic acts in support of political or social causes, typically through posting comments online, signing petitions, or clicking "like" buttons without taking more significant action, which may involve making donations, volunteering work, or active participation in advocacy campaigns. While some view slacktivism as an easy way to show moral concern without committing to anything meaningful, others argue that even small actions can lead to broader engagement. This can eventually become tangible.

Slacktivism gained popularity during the advent of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. This is where it became more accessible for people to express their opinions, spread awareness about issues, and mobilise around common goals. By sharing posts, using relevant hashtags, or participating in viral challenges, people could demonstrate solidarity without leaving the comfort of their homes or putting forth much effort. However, critics have pointed out that such superficial engagements might only result in real change if they inspire further involvement or lead to more substantial forms of activism.

Ethics of Social Media Activism

Individuals must be aware that when they utilise social media, especially for activist purposes, they expose private information about themselves and potentially those within their networks. Users should be mindful of how their posts influence others positively or negatively. Sharing personal details and images without permission raises ethical questions and erodes trust among friends and followers.

Social media activism runs the risk of spreading false information due to hastily shared misquoted articles, doctored photos, intentionally biased reports, outdated facts, poor translations, partial accounts, unverified testimonies, manipulated polls, selectively edited videos, clickbait titles designed to provoke emotions instead of inform objectively, and memes whose humour relies more on shock value than nuanced comprehension. Spreading rumours and fake news undermines the power of legitimate messages and damages honest activists' reputations. Thus, verifying sources and double-checking claims before reposting or leaving a positive comment can mitigate the negative consequences of publishing incorrect details.

Engaging in online activism creates opportunities for building alliances across borders and forming coalitions based on shared interests. However, it is imperative not to tokenise minoritised individuals or reduce complex struggles to mere trends. We must ensure genuine solidarity through mutual understanding, empathetic listening, and concrete action plans grounded in grassroots knowledge and experience.

HISTORY

Social media activism has its roots in pre-digital forms of collective resistance, but some early instances of modern digital activism date back to Usenet discussion boards during the 1980s and '90s. These bulletin board systems enabled users to post messages and converse on specific topics. With limited capabilities compared to today's social media platforms, they allowed for the creation of virtual communities focused on various issues such as feminist discourse, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer advocacy, environmental protection, anti-racist campaigns, and other progressive causes.

One notable example from the era before broadband internet access was Project Vote Smart, established by Richard Kimball in 1992. His initiative used dial-up phone lines to provide Americans with easy access to extensive candidate information, including biographies, voting records, issue positions, ratings from special interest groups, speech texts, campaign finance data, and direct contact methods for elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels. While Project Vote Smart initially operated via telephone hotlines, it eventually became an interactive website. This provided valuable resources for voter education and government transparency. Kimball's pioneering work showed the tremendous potential of electronic communications technologies to enhance democratic participation and stimulate civil involvement beyond traditional electoral cycles.

The mainstream adoption of graphic user interfaces (GUIs), HTML, HTTP, and search engines, such as Google, in the late 1990s catalysed the growth of personal websites, online diaries, and amateur content creation. Blogger and LiveJournal became popular tools for self-expression and sharing opinions on current affairs, further blurring the boundaries between private musings and public spheres. This initial phase of social media paved the way for viral content dissemination, network effects, and bottom-up participatory cultures.

With its growing email list (over 7 million members by mid-2005), MoveOn.org campaigns against Fox News Channel bias and supports Hurricane Katrina relief efforts: To influence corporate decision-making or promote philanthropic giving, the influential liberal nonprofit used its email list to send targeted action alerts, which resulted in emails, faxes, phone calls, and donations. Such tactics contributed to Fox News moderating its programming tone and bolstering humanitarian aid responses after the natural disaster struck New Orleans and surrounding areas.

With the success of MySpace and the subsequent rapid expansion of Facebook since 2004, global audiences have seen unprecedented connectivity options within closed environments tailored to individual identity expression, peer interaction, and content consumption. These walled gardens leverage algorithms to surface relevant updates from friends, groups, pages, advertisements, and multimedia materials. This accelerates information cascades, echo chambers, and tribalism.

Social media activism surrounding COVID-19 provides an excellent illustration of how internet platforms can function as powerful megaphones for raising awareness, driving change, sharing news updates, challenging false narratives, coalescing around common goals, promoting advocacy campaigns, fostering emotional support networks during difficult times, and facilitating collective action—all in real-time. A wide range of grassroots initiatives emerged on social media urging individuals to get vaccinated or mask up, share personal stories debunking conspiracies, counteract discredited "studies," offer evidence-based resources supporting mainstream science, criticise anti-vax celebrity influence or politician statements undermining herd immunity, and highlight the benefits of protecting vulnerable populations unable to receive vaccines directly (such as infants or elderly persons). Creators crafted compelling visual or interactive content focusing on self-care practices, mental wellness techniques, work-from-home hacks, homeschooling ideas, local communities events adapting to remote environments, lighthearted jokes poking fun at bizarre situations peculiar to quarantine life, and skill-sharing tutorials assisting other users facing new obstacles. People could de-stress amidst the chaos by broadcasting coping strategies via podcasts, blogs, videos, image macros, or GIF sets. They could also feel less isolated, gain inspiration, and find new coping methods.

CURRENT SCENARIO

Over the current decade, there has been a meteoric rise in social media activism, a concept that is often called online activism. The expansion of digital technology and easy web accessibility across the globe, coupled with widespread smartphone ownership, has allowed millions of individuals to join the global conversation via social media platforms integrated into their day-to-day routines. Consequently, individuals are leveraging social media's vast expanse to share their viewpoints, share essential data, and coordinate joint initiatives at an unparalleled level.

Among several factors that explain this phenomenon, affordable smartphones with constant internet availability provide a seamless online presence even without traditional computers. Moreover, social media companies continue expanding their services by creating innovative features tailored towards user satisfaction and efficiency in sharing multimedia content. In

addition, people increasingly rely on these portals for communication among friends and family members; hence, they spend extended periods online interacting with followers or subscribers while discovering emerging trends and topics.

Another reason for the upsurge in social media activism is human nature - our tendency to seek affiliation or common ground within communities defined by shared interests or goals. While niche social networks have proliferated to accommodate divergent interests, more general ones like Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and Youtube encourage community-building among its billions of registered users by offering content creation, distribution, commenting, messaging, and collaboration tools. With each post or reaction potentially reaching thousands of people almost instantly, these dynamics naturally facilitate conversations spanning different backgrounds and opinions. Ideas may germinate from personal experiences or external sources, including published articles, viral tweets, or even memes!

A third driver behind social media activism pertains to our universal yearning for recognition and validation. This is when we believe in something strong enough to express it openly despite potential backlash. Digital technologies enable one-way shoutouts for causes dearest to our hearts alongside like-minded adherents. Through endorsements, emojis, or simple retweeting, users show solidarity toward ideological peers who reciprocate similar gestures accordingly. Sharing motivational posts or heartwarming stories concerning pressing issues helps keep communities engaged around central themes. This is done while also enticing passive visitors to participate in the activity.

In 2013, the movement known as "#BlackLivesMatter " (or BLM) emerged as a powerful voice advocating against systemic racism, police violence, and anti-blackness in America and beyond. After gaining traction following Trayvon Martin's murder two years prior, BLM further solidified its position in 2020. This was when a black man named George Floyd died during an arrest by Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) officers. Amidst nationwide protests sparked by his passing, BLM became a key player in amplifying crucial discussions about institutionalised discrimination and racial inequality. To date, millions of individuals from all over the globe engage in this socio-political campaign on various social media platforms. This challenges dominant narratives, exposes abuses, and promotes change for black lives. You can easily spot their hashtags or visual hallmarks promoting education and action throughout diverse communities seeking justice, equity, and love. These hallmarks are countermeasures to persistent oppression.

In October 2017, a viral hashtag highlighted the countless experiences previously hidden within whispers or silence. The "#MeToo" movement provided a platform for victims/survivors of sexual harassment, misconduct, or abuse to break their solitude, speak truths, and identify common threads connecting otherwise isolated incidents. By courageously sharing personal stories across industries, serial offenders can reach positions of power. This was from Hollywood to politics, media to academia, business to sports, etc. This virtual phenomenon helped demonstrate how pervasive these crimes were and sparked urgent reexaminations of existing systems meant to prevent and address them appropriately. Those who had suffered without recourse or resolution suddenly found allies and empowerment among networks of supporters championing individual healing, institutional changes, and criminal justice reform. With heightened public attention and increased pressure for transparency came more investigations, resignations/terminations, legal actions, and amended legislation. These actions impact workplace cultures and policies towards gender equality nationwide and internationally. While some detractors attempted to stifle progress or undermine allegations, others continued to contribute resources and reinforce victims' rights.

In spring 2021, another hot-button topic arose globally around the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians competing over ancestral lands under contested claims, governance structures, borders, citizenship criteria, and human rights standards. Since then, hostilities and tensions have intensified amid disagreements regarding political and security measures. For decades, international observers, regional players, civil society organisations, and concerned individuals around the world have debated, contributed opinions, donated funds, expressed empathy, denounced practices they deemed unacceptable, taken sides, proposed alternatives, supported negotiations, or invoked relevant laws like the Geneva Conventions, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, or UN Resolutions affecting both parties.

As an information hub for human societies, social media platforms have proven to be highly influential and versatile tools to amplify voices that are not heard by wider audiences. Groups advocating for various causes can organise campaigns online to raise awareness, disseminate information, engage supporters, coordinate actions, petition authorities, garner financial backing, counter false narratives, provide counselling services, and much more. Whether led by charismatic leaders, dedicated volunteers, passionate amateurs, resourceful nonprofits, committed professionals, visionary innovators, or anyone motivated to advance particular goals, these movements demonstrate a variety of grassroots capacities. However, some

drawbacks and limitations must also be acknowledged and managed responsibly to ensure positive consequences (e.g., privacy violations, addiction hazards, echo chambers, misinformation traps, and algorithmic manipulations).

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Some proposed solutions to enable social media activism are:

1. Effective social media activism requires a clear and specific message about the issue being addressed. It should be understandable and relatable to everyday experiences, making it easier for supporters to align themselves with the movement. Ensure that the purpose and objectives of the activism are stated plainly so people know what they're backing.
2. Users should utilise various platforms strategically, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, YouTube, etc. They should customise posts based on audience demographics, usage patterns, platform capabilities, and algorithm dynamics to reach desired targets effectively. Choosing apt hashtags related to issues and movements, including regionally popular variations, allows audiences to discover activism content alongside others searching for relevant discussions.
3. Tagging relevant profiles, users, influencers, publications, businesses, politicians, interest groups, government entities, and nonprofit organisations involved in relevant causes, engaging actively with those interested, following best practices for building long-term relationships through personalised interactions and responding promptly to comments, messages, queries, and concerns. This helps promote content, build brand visibility, and foster a loyal and engaged audience. It also helps to create positive sentiment towards the brand, building trust and credibility in the industry.
4. Users should form alliances with sympathetic organisations, groups, leaders, experts, research institutions, NGOs, and charities dedicated to parallel missions, complementary issues, or common beneficiaries. They should unite around mutually reinforcing beliefs and interests to maximise resources, skills, outreach capabilities, network diversity, financial assistance, expert opinions, and moral authority. Working together on coordinated messaging efforts, joint campaigns, simultaneous releases, collaborative investigations, multi-group signatories, crowdfunding projects, petition drives, awareness days, cross-promotion,

resource distribution, coalition governance, consensus building, conflict resolution, issue intersectionality appreciation, crisis response coordination are all possible ways that organisations can work together to support an issue, build momentum, and spread information.

5. Social media activism can be influential when approached with careful planning and attention to detail. Building alliances, honing messages, utilising statistics, deploying A/B testing, engaging microtargeting, fostering diverse perspectives, employing user-generated content, implementing a mobile-first approach, embracing paid promotion, cultivating high-quality storytelling, adopting video marketing, applying chatbot technology, practising accessibility, designing visually appealing graphics, tailoring voice search optimisations, integrating virtual events, sharing case studies, disseminating reports, conducting webinars, providing mentorship, promoting educational tutorials, creating podcast episodes, distributing newsletters, encouraging subscriber loyalty programs, offering sponsored posts, hosting exclusive giveaways, and maintaining brand consistency are vital aspects of successful social media activism.

SUGGESTED MODERATED CAUCUS TOPICS

1. Discussing social media activism and its impact on mental health awareness
2. Discussing social media activism ethics: how far is too far?
3. Discussing ways to balance the positive and negative impacts of social media activism.
4. Analysing ways to build cross-border networks for social media activism, including strategies for collaboration and communication across different cultural and political contexts.
5. Discussing the responsibility of social media companies in facilitating or hindering social media activism, and exploring potential solutions to ensure these companies are held accountable.
6. Analysing the role of social media companies in facilitating or hindering social media activism, and exploring potential solutions to ensure these companies are held accountable.

7. Discussing how activists should balance their online presence with offline action to achieve maximum impact.
8. Discussing the unique challenges presented by social media activism for activists working across borders and language barriers.
9. Evaluating if online platforms are saturated with noise and whether it has become increasingly difficult to reach an engaged audience through social media activism.
10. Addressing the issue of online harassment and bullying and their impact on one's mental health.

REFERENCE LINKS

(Note: Delegates, some of the links are only meant for light reading and thus are not highlighted, only refer to the highlighted sources as valid proof as others may or may not be accepted as a source of proof in the Council. The decision of the Presiding Officer in regard to the acceptable sources is Final and Binding.)

1. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-activism/>
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