

Hashtag Democracy: Social Media Movements and the Shifting Terrain of Civic Engagement

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Abstract: *Social media platforms have changed the overall view of civic engagement, offering a variety of spaces for political participation, democratic discourse, and digital activism. These digital environments have basically restructured the way citizens organize and communicate among themselves. This paper explores the movements of hashtag activism—where viral content and symbols of hashtags aid social movements and bring together public opinion. Considering global campaigns such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo with Indian movements like #FarmersProtest and #JusticeForManisha, my study explores how people's participation and collective opinion support the movement and make an impact in the action.*

With the help of comparative analysis, the paper focuses on how social media help decentralize mobilization, amplify marginalized voices, and build unity across nations. However, it also raises concern about the limitations of digital activism, which include issues of surveillance by government or corporations, algorithmic bias, political polarization, and the chances of performative participation. The dual nature of social media—as a tool for strengthening the movement or potentially restricting the voices—raises questions about the long-term and true online participation of people.

We collected the primary data through an online survey of approximately 100 participants, which included people from different age groups, genders, locations, and backgrounds. This led to findings that people are aware of digital activism and engage themselves in the hashtag movements, but concern was raised about the chances of misinformation and performative engagement.

Finally, the paper evaluates the developing role of social media in shaping democratic participation, especially in the Indian scenario where digital education, access, and political atmosphere influence the potency of online mobilization. It argues that while hashtag activism can democratize discussion and stimulate change, it must be enriched by offline action and institutional support to achieve long-term impact..

Keywords: Social media, digital activism, civic engagement, hashtag movements, political participation, participatory culture, online mobilization

