

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA'S SOCIAL MOVEMENTS LEADING TO NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE AND POLICYMAKING: CASES FROM INDIA

ESHA SEN MADHAVAN
Department of Politics and Public Administration
University of Madras
esha.madhavan@gmail.com

Abstract: Just as internet has touched and transformed every aspect of human life in present times, its significant effects on the realms of politics and governance is captured in this essay through some real world events like the social movements. Internet and social media have given new strength to social activism and in the process have laid the path for a new form of governance model – open, consultative and inclusive. India has witnessed social movements that have resulted in significant policy related decision making. In the recent times, such social movements have gained much of its momentum through internet and social media. In this essay, three social movements from India are compared and analysed through case study research in order to draw attention to the growing prevalence of a new form of open consultative policy making process that is both leading to a learning experience for the networked society and also creating newer responsibilities for citizens. The three social movements analysed are the Right to Information Act movement (2005); the India Against Corruption movement (2011); and the Net neutrality movement (2015). The case studies are analysed in terms of their unique features of fostering deliberative democracy under the possible influence of internet and social media. The case studies generate data that could be used to study similar practices with a global comparative perspective.

Keywords: social media, network, governance, movement, deliberative

INTRODUCTION

Communication power is on the rise. Internet, through transforming and strengthening this communication power has altered the traditional positions of power in unprecedented ways. Just as internet¹ has touched and transformed every aspect of human life in present times, its significant effects on the realms of politics and governance is captured in this essay through some real world events like the social

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movements. Mass movements that have focused on either demanding the legislation of or protesting against specific policy related issues have been termed as social movements in this essay and thus the essay focuses on the transformations in the area of politics and governance. Some of the social movements mentioned here reflect not just the mobilizing power of internet communication but most importantly the real existence of the virtual network society. On the one hand, social media has so far been internet's most hybrid product combining its unique features as communication technology as well as mass media, on the other, social movements have become the most striking feature of the present history of post-social media human society across the world – striking in terms of frequency, mobilization, popularity and impact. Social media has rendered these recent mass movements unique in terms of their momentum of mobilizing power. These unique features are the reasons for most of the renewed vigour in revisiting the study of new forms of social networks with their resulting social movements. This essay is such a study of mass movement in a transformed network society.

According to Howard Rheingold, communication power is political power, because the power to influence the beliefs and perceptions of populations has proven to be the most effective political weapon of the century. It is difficult to analyse the changing communication power of people, with direct or indirect² access to internet, without embedding such change within the context of the political environment – democratic (in its various forms) or non-democratic. Even some of the recent social movements that have happened in non-democratic political systems have happened for reasons of democracy, either to establish it some form or to consolidate it further. Democracy is thus vital to communication and at the same time renders it problematic. This paper describes some of the changes in the processes of policy making viewing it as a communication process between networks of actors. The effect of social media on mass mobilization, the consequent effect of such mobilization on the impact and effectiveness of social movements, the changes in the overall governance and processes of policy making are some of the themes that have been taken up for study in this paper. This paper explores the dynamics of the

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correlation between these themes within the context of the democratic politics of India through a cross case analysis. Thus a description of the changes occurring in the policy making processes, and whether it is possible to establish a correlation between such changes and the presence of internet and social media, is the central question of study here.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this study, the theoretical framework used is distinguished in two different areas – the theories and concepts related to democracy and those related to internet. The model of democracy which forms the theoretical foundation of this study is deliberative democracy. A deliberative democracy is any form of public deliberation of free and equal citizens aimed at political decision-making and self-governance. According to this position, deliberation is free if it is “not constrained” by the authority of prior norms or requirements: “Under conditions of ideal deliberation, as Habermas has stated, no force except that of the better argument is exercised” (Held 2006: 57).

Deliberative democratic public sphere theory has become increasingly popular in internet-democracy research and commentary: “The notion of a public sphere of informal citizen deliberation enabling the formation of rational public opinion that can critically guide political systems is seen by many democratic theorists as central to strong democracy” (Dahlberg 2007: 49).

A deliberative model has become prominent within academic and civil society e-democracy circles. This model posits the internet as the means for an expansion of a public sphere of citizen deliberation leading to rational public opinion that can hold official decision makers accountable.

The researcher draws from the basic theory of social networking and combines it with Habermas’s definition of NET (here meaning the internet) in order to select the case and site of research for this study. According to the theory of social networking, social networking whether online or in person, focuses on social capital. 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 capacity to organise members across organizations or causes (Analysing Social Media Momentum Report 2012: 2).

Deliberative theory of democracy is broad. The goals attributed to public deliberation range from informed citizenry, and informed public opinion, to mobilizing citizens for participating in the creation of public policy. The expectations from citizens also vary from providing informed public opinion to working through issues together.

The public sphere being the communication channel of the 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). It is by making this the framework of analysis that the researcher selects three civil society movements as cases which offer the opportunity to study the possible correlation between the use of internet and social media and formal policy outcomes, since policy outcomes ultimately depend upon the extent of influence the stakeholders could have based on their level and scope for participation.

Internet provides a new public space, which is not synonymous with a new public sphere. As public space, the internet provides yet another forum for political deliberation. As public sphere, the internet could facilitate discussion that promotes a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. It is the taking up of communicative rationality within informal interactions that constitutes the social space of democratic reasoning known as the public sphere. Thus it is also the form of communication, and not just the content, that is decisive in defining the boundaries of this sphere. It is here that social media has displayed some unique role in transforming the form of communication that

establishes newer network potential that influences individual and consequent collective public opinion formation and participation.

The cases selected here for comparison are typical in exhibiting conditions for the specific factors to be studied (generalizations beyond the specific practices studied might be limited). The principle factor of study here is the use of internet and social media by social movement organisers or other stakeholders for mobilizations or deliberation.

According to Habermas, decision making is possible through a reenergised, activist, engaged citizenry, working together to create new small scale communicative associative institutions that over time merge into larger ones, or at least join forces. These three cases offer the most reliable opportunities to locate these criteria.

METHODOLOGY

The three social movements³ selected are the Right to Information Act movement (2005); the India Against Corruption movement (2011); and the Net neutrality movement (2015). The social movements are studied through case study methodology and then the three cases are compared based on the selected parameters. The analysis is done from the perspective of the organisers of the social movement focusing on their ad hoc as well as planned actions aimed at fulfilling the movements' objectives as well as reacting to various actions of other stakeholders involved.

The cases are selected across a time span of twenty years (1995-2015) thus each case is decontextualized in terms of time of the event, involving different patterns of engagement and different backgrounds of stakeholders. However, they are all embedded into the same political landscape of India within the same geographical and cultural boundaries of a country thus enabling the identification of the factor that was present in varying degrees between any two cases and thus inferentially linking it to difference in outcomes. The cases are selected on the basis of having the common factor of being social movements, all aimed at major law or policy related decision making processes.

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Given the fact that social phenomena like social movements are often rooted in a complex web of causes, it would be impossible to isolate the effect of the dynamics of relationships of other factors that might have extraneous influence here. Yet based on the factual data about the advent of different forms of internet technology and media and their subsequent use in India, it was easy to identify the difference in the adoption and use of social media in the three different cases having taken place at three different points of time. The independent factor of the internet and social media is physically present in different forms with different levels of functional influence at the different time periods to which the cases of analysis belong.

The role of internet and social media⁴ is treated as an independent variable here and its effect on the mass movements (in the physical or online world) is examined here in order to draw inferences regarding the possibility of any correlation existing between the social media effected mass movements and on the changing pattern of policy making processes. The effect is analysed in terms of the extent of “Goal Attainment” in each of the movements. The factor of Goal Attainment is subdivided into parameters, which are defined and described in detail below.

Deliberation has been considered vital to the democratic process of policy related decision-making. Therefore, while analysing the social movements, deliberation has been treated as part being the goal of the movement along with the policy outcome. The assumption here has been that goal of the movement as exhibited by its organisers is treated as its sole objective without getting into the other strategic objectives that it could have had, which would be incorrect and biased to assume simply because this analysis is being done in retrospect and therefore having knowledge of the events that unfolded later on.

The extent and quality of deliberation across platforms, whether physical or online, across cases have not been studied in terms of theoretical normatives. But the existence of deliberation is located with data⁵ about participation of people, methods of interfacing and consultations used under conditions of various structures of platforms⁶ (physical or virtual). Since there is no general agreement on the criterion, which could determine when deliberation is successful, studying spe-



cific practices of a select group of online participants bound by a particular issue and pre moderation, cannot be called representative of the diverse and prolific practices of cyberspace and therefore not taken up for analysis here. However, it definitely opens up avenues for future research.

Goal Attainment in the context of democratic deliberation is not just the making of the law or policy demanded by the people but also ensuring that some of the democratic safeguards are maintained. Thus deliberation is treated as one of the parameters of the goal of social movements along with other parameters. All the parameters of goal attainment are included under the assumption that these factors are controllable through effective planning and strategizing to a large extent by any of the stakeholders – the organizing civil society organization (CSO)⁷ of the movement, the government, or any other stakeholder participating in the policy or law making process. Therefore, the factor of Goal Attainment is further broken down into parameters like: *a*) mobilization; *b*) fostering deliberation; *c*) policy outcome; *d*) awareness and operational continuity.

The other factors like background, structural elements – purpose, organizing body, strategies – are left out from analysis for reasons of their vastness and expanse of extraneous influence and yet mentioned in context in order to generate data for future works in similar lines.

The author has predominantly used desk research methods and referred to public records, government reports, peer reviewed research sources, transcripts of interviews, scholarly articles, secondary data on content analysis of online platforms and news reports in reputable newspapers to outline the cases and analyse the selected parameters of study.



THE THREE SOCIAL MOVEMENT CASES: THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT (RTI) MOVEMENT

Background and brief outline of the movement

In the 1990s there was a rise in the demand for Right to Information in India. Globally there was a trend of adopting freedom of information legislation and policies across various countries⁸. “Multi-lateral donor agencies were persuading governments, especially in countries of the South, to set up transparency regimes, often as conditionality to loans and aid” (Singh 2010: 2). It was a time when India was opening up its doors to global markets through policies on economic liberalization. There was a growing dissatisfaction with representative democracy in India with the ever increasing distance between the state and the citizen amidst growing political and economic inequalities. The citizens wanted to participate beyond just elections in matters of law that affected them.

From the early 1990s, a grassroots movement had started in the rural areas of the state of Rajasthan⁹ in India demanding access to government information on behalf of the wage workers and small farmers who were often deprived of their rightful wages or their just benefits under government schemes. The grassroots organization Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan¹⁰ (MKSS) had started articulating these demands of the farmers into a strong demand for official information recorded in government files. The movement slowly metamorphosed into a mass movement that quickly spread across the country. The need was felt for a national RTI legislation and this needed a national body that could coordinate and oversee the legislation process.

It was at this stage the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information¹¹ (NCPRI) came to be formed with activists, journalists, lawyers, retired civil servants and academics among its founding members. At the early stage it played crucial role in assimilating the demands of the people at the grassroots level and then moving them towards the articulation stage. The formulation of the draft RTI bill was a collaborative process spanning from 1996 to 2005 involving the



participation of the Government, the Parliament and NCPRI along with the entire body of participating CSOs.

The first formal draft¹² of the bill was created by the joint effort of NCPRI and the Press Council of India¹³ (PCI). Several state government versions of the law¹⁴ were already in force but with hardly much substance. After moving through several rounds of conferences, committee meetings, and discussions, revising, reviewing and amending the drafts, the national Freedom of Information Act was passed in 2002. The failure of this Act in providing a date of effect¹⁵, ultimately made way for a more robust and stronger national RTI Act, passed finally in 2005.

Structural elements

The purpose of this section is to generate data for further study about the various elements of the process of social movement that focus on its planning and its execution even within the dominant condition of a social movement's dependence on ad hoc measures and therefore getting treated as a social experiment. This section helps in analysing social movements empirically in terms of how these operations could well be treated as well-coordinated and well executed act of strategizing and consultations involving a wide spectrum of beneficiaries of the outcome (social, political or economic).

Purpose. There was a growing need for transparency in state-citizen relationship. Such transparency was achievable through a national RTI Act. But the main objective of this law-making exercise was to make it happen through a deliberative, consultative process that involved the participation of all the stakeholders through mutual acceptance of each other's concerns and opinions.

Organizing Body. The background of the global trends along with the domestic socio-economic demands had made it expedient on the government and its bureaucracy to make way for not just such a law, but such a process of law-making. However, the role of the advocacy

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organization NCPRI to emerge and evolve into a key umbrella organization representing the several other stakeholders including the citizens, has to be mentioned especially for its role in keeping the pressure of demands built on the ruling governments (with three changes in government during the period)¹⁶ and thus keeping the stakes high.

Strategies. NCPRI not just managed to establish its credibility as a representative of the people, as an umbrella organization representing the combined interests of the various CSOs, it also very strategically broadened its constituency of supporters by coordinating with numerous workshops, conventions and seminars hosted by universities and research institutions that were held throughout the country during the period.

The incorporation of local knowledge of the people at the articulation stage immensely shaped the design of the process. This local knowledge proved crucial not just as a great source of knowledge and information, but also its inclusion increased the legitimacy and sense of participation among the people. It also proved effective in awareness raising and learning capacity building.

Specialised Subject Knowledge of individuals who were active members of the civil society groups like those of NCPRI played important role in the success of the process. Most of the members of these groups as well as individual members had backgrounds in law, civil services and academia, which proved immensely helpful at a collaborative stage of drafting of the law when the government looked for active support and participation. At the formulation stage, without the specialised knowledge resource and the promptness of delivering with suggestions and advice, the government would have leveraged out of it in every possible way by delaying or obstructing the process.

The ability to establish and maintain excellent network with the media of the country by representatives of CSOs proved extremely beneficial throughout the entire period of the operation. The media attention given to both the movement, as well as its leadership across national dailies played an important role in forwarding its cause.



Goal Attainment

Mobilization. For the ease of analysis, the social movements have been divided into phases – articulation phase and formulation phase. In fact, mobilization of the masses as per the requirement of the stage to which the movement belongs could be considered important criteria while analysing the outcomes of the movements.

At the articulation stage, when the grassroots forces were joining hands to form a collective demand for transparency, the MKSS used the method of “Jan Sunwai”¹⁷, meaning public hearing: “Typically, such meetings would be presided over by a well-known and disinterested party (such as a popular poet, or an NGO worker) which would ensure that a modicum of neutrality was established and maintained throughout the process” (Sharma 2003: 369). When faced with resistance from the government the method of mass meeting along with “dharna”¹⁸ (mass sitting in protest) was used that was capable of mobilizing large masses of people with a common interest.

The extensive networks of the leaders of the MKSS with urban intelligentsia from around the country played an important role as representatives of the media, intellectuals, academicians and elected representatives participated and spoke at the meeting. The media kept treating the issue of RTI with high priority throughout the process and thus it kept having national coverage almost throughout the entire period of its operation.

At the formulation stage, it was mostly the series of consultation of the organizing CSO with several committees and ministers and changing governments. At this stage the mobilizing methods were mostly used when faced with resistance or complete deadlocks among the stakeholders. But such mobilizations mostly remained confined to workshops, conventions and seminars hosted by universities and research institutions that were held throughout the country during the period. Use of mass email protests has been located in the operation of this movement during this phase. But as internet statistics suggest, there was hardly any mobilization on internet apart from limited use of emails.



The formulation stage mostly comprised the use of specialised knowledge resource and it was the promptness of delivering with suggestions and advice coupled with the mobilizing tactic at the right moment, that the government got hardly much option to leverage out of the process by delaying or obstructing it. Expertise of several CSOs combined along with external experts was mobilised throughout the process.

Fostering deliberation. Some of the methods of deliberation ranged from open platform public conversation to intensive drafting processes involving knowledge specialists. There were several instances of document review, informational meetings, public hearings, advisory committee formation and their meetings. As mentioned earlier, in the RTI movement the first phase of mobilization happened at the grass-roots level and participation in consultation process happened through the method of “Jan Sunwai”. At the formulation stage, consultation happened mostly among the members of the CSO groups and the stakeholders from the government and the bureaucracy. The individual members had backgrounds in law, civil services and academia, which proved immensely helpful at a collaborative stage of drafting of the law when the government looked for active support and participation.

Policy outcome. The Right to Information Bill, as amended, was passed by both houses of the Indian Parliament in May 2005, got Presidential assent on 15 June 2005, and became fully operational from 13 October 2005.

The movement achieved its objective of having the law take a form fulfilling in most of its substance. Its attempt at including the voices of citizen whose day to day life would get directly affected by it, in the act of making such a law, was an act of democratic consolidation.

Awareness and operational continuity. Proper implementation of the law is a matter of present concern. General lack of awareness about the law is also present to a great extent¹⁹. Stalling such attempts has been a matter of effective operational continuity by stakeholder agen-

cies. The NCPRI along with other CSOs have been able to continue to monitor the implementation of the law to some extent. They have it in their agenda to ensure that the law is easily accessible. Raising awareness and training of the people on how to use the law are being done by CSOs. Attempts at amending the RTI law has been averted through effective monitoring and protests²⁰. Improvement in terms of bringing political parties within the ambit of the law has been demanded for in recent times.

INDIA AGAINST CORRUPTION MOVEMENT

Background and brief outline of the movement

Transparency International ranked India 95 out of 182 on its 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of 3.1. Additionally, Transparency International reported that more than fifty percent of Indian respondents disclosed they paid bribes to use basic public services, which indicates a relatively high level of actual corruption. Several highly publicised scams involving the Commonwealth Games, the Indian Premier League, and the telecommunications industry helped spark more recent interest in curbing corruption. In 2010, following major corruption scandals, the Indian government drafted a version of a Lokpal bill. A "Lokpal" (ombudsman) is a government official or organization that investigates individual complaints against public officials. Many citizens and social activists considered the proposed measure weak, as it did not cover the prime minister, members of Parliament, and cabinet ministers.

To create awareness and highlight the multiple scams, social activist Anna Hazare commenced an anti-corruption movement, India Against Corruption (IAC), in April 2011 based on the non-violent teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. The objective of this movement was to press the Government of India to pass legislation aimed at deterring corruption, reducing grievances of corruption and protecting whistle blowers. In 2010 Government drafted a version of the Lokpal bill. Social activists said it was not strong enough and drafted their own bill.

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India Against Corruption (IAC) was formed to lead fight against corruption.

Anna Hazare, a noted social activist, went on a hunger strike on 5 April 2011, to exert pressure on the government of India to enact a strong anti-corruption act as envisaged in the Jan Lokpal Bill. The 5 day Hazare campaign mobilised around five million people mostly through various social networking sites on the Internet. The government had agreed to introduce the ombudsman bill – known as the Lokpal – into parliament. But due to lack of majority in Rajya Sabha the bill has not been passed into law yet.

Structural elements

Purpose. An effective independent and empowered Lokpal institution was the sole purpose of this movement. Hazare and others believed that the government's version of the Lokpal bill was too weak because the ombudsman it would establish could not investigate actions of elected officials. The government argued that an ombudsman was a good idea, but that it would be too powerful if it was able to investigate elected leaders.

Organizing body. The face of the movement has been 74-year-old Anna Hazare of Ralegan Siddhi, a small village in the state of Maharashtra, India. He has led anticorruption protests for two decades. The 2011 anticorruption movement, organised under the name India Against Corruption, has by far been the largest he has led consisting of a team of key members belonging to various civil society bodies with backgrounds in law, public administration, academia.

Strategies. Anticorruption movement organisers and supporters significantly used internet and social media to mobilise masses within the shortest possible time frame. Most of the media strategies were aimed at garnering the maximum possible attention through the combined amplified effect of both internet platforms along with traditional mass media²¹. A dedicated team of information technology experts

ran IAC's main website along with fourteen city-centric websites round-the-clock. They also monitored TV channels and posted videos on the internet to create a buzz across the globe. Another team ensured that the latest information about Hazare, soon after he was arrested, was posted on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Pressure on the government was created through hunger strikes, jail bharo²² and mass public meetings. Conceptualizing catch phrases like "I am Anna" led to further internalizing the struggle for anti-graft policy among supporters.

Goal Attainment

Mobilization. At the initial stages (early 2011) when demands were made for a strong anti-corruption Lokpal Bill, marches were held across Indian cities along with mass rally in New Delhi. However, after talks between civil society organizations headed by Anna Hazare and the Indian Government failed to build consensus over the drafting of the bill, Anna Hazare went on a hunger strike from April 5, 2011. The fasting not only created pressure on the government, it resulted in protest rallies across the country in support of Hazare. Anti-corruption movement organisers and supporters used social media to broadcast information about the fast. This resulted in mass mobilization of people who took to internet and social media to show solidarity and support for the India Against Corruption Movement.

In the first four days of its existence, IAC had 116,000 fans on its community Facebook page. People created many other Facebook pages, and individual social media users debated, posted statuses, and uploaded videos and photos throughout the movement. The total online support for the movement was around 1.5 million people²³.

Facebook hosts multiple Anna Hazare-related pages in English and Hindi, with tens of thousands of followers and supporters. The official IAC Facebook page had more than 500,000 followers as of February 7, 2012. Users can follow and access information about the anticorruption movement through applications for smart phones and

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other mobile devices. The IAC smart phone application has as many as 50,000 users.

The IAC organization used all digital outlets to publish photos of Anna Hazare fasting, pro-Lokpal rallies, and examples of corruption. This not just mobilised support from other CSOs and activists, but also the general populace.

The social media pages were created on the day of the first meeting and posts were made as an invitation to the event page about the day the fast was about to be held. Thus social media not just helped in organizing events around the movement, it mobilised people based on information shared about the fast and the movement. The movement gained popularity through support shown not only in terms of physical turn up at the events, but also online discussions on specific forums and social media through likes and comments and other structural features of engagement available online. Thus support for the movement was built up through strategic use of communication methods before any of the important meetings between the government and the CSOs.

The first fast was ended with 15 August 2011 as the deadline for the government to pass strong Lokpal bill when the parliament was in session. Even though the next draft of the bill was introduced in the lower house of the parliament, it was considered weak by the IAC as the bill did not include the entire government within its ambit. This constant lack of consensus was after a point was treated as almost inevitable by the IAC organisers as it is evident from the social media posts regarding the declaration of the event of the second “fast unto death” by Anna Hazare from 16 August 2011.

The growing support evident on social media for the movement made the organisers post details of the hunger strike event, regardless of government response or attempts at appeasement. Thus more than building a consensus between the stakeholders at this moment, the movement organisers were busy making most of resources already spent on mobilizing masses and thus going ahead with declared events in order not to kill the momentum of the movement. As support grew, so did the size of the concession needed by the government to cancel the fast.

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Thus the availability of data on mobilization of a movement plays a crucial role in understanding the support base of the stakeholders in a collaborative lawmaking process. For the first time internet and social media makes such data available at an unprecedented level of detail.

Taking the perspective of the government for example reveals how the government ignored the online data in terms of the IAC support base, how it failed to read, predict and use the data in order to strategise its own actions regarding the Lokpal Bill pre legislation process. The actions of the government against the IAC movement like dictating terms of rally and fasting events in terms of venue, number of participants, created negative perceptions about government actions. The government's use of the media failed massively due to lack of strategy compared to that of the IAC organisers. The government could have used the media in highlighting its efforts to pass a strong Lokpal. Instead the Prime Minister's use of the independence day speech as a platform to criticise Hazare, Hazare and IAC key members being taken into preventive custody in order not to let them fast, are some of the blunders committed that added on to the drama of the protest with hardly any substantive value for the ultimate objective of the entire pre legislative process.

Hazare's supporters released a video of the arrest on social media. It called for fasts, peaceful protest, and a jail bhara, where protesters sought arrest so as to fill India's prisons. After several negotiations with the government, Hazare agreed to get released from jail on the promise of being allowed to fast publicly without restrictions. Tens of thousands of people gathered in the following rally to show their support and fast with Hazare, while thousands more supported Hazare online through social media. After further discussions with Hazare and debates in Parliament, the government agreed to debate all versions of the Lokpal bill. This agreement prompted Hazare to end his hunger strike on 28 August 2011.

From the above it is clear that this movement hardly progressed through stages of drafting process starting with aggregating and incorporating the opinions and inputs from the people through discussions towards more specialised debates and discussions among experts and building consensus through resolutions of various conflicting points.

Instead it exhibits a continuous process of mobilization, garnered mostly through the use of internet and social media, without any distinct articulation and formulation phase, with the entire process taking place in constant media glare.

Fostering deliberation. As mentioned before, without clear stages of articulation and formulation of the drafting of the Lokpal bill in 2011, the deliberation process too continued to be a continuous process with stakeholders and their supporters getting mobilised differently at different points of time, most significantly during the parliament sessions and then sporadically throughout the process till the end of the movement. The continuous incorporations of peoples' opinions and suggestions along with discussions among expert groups is being made significantly possible by the existence of internet and social media during the IAC movement.

Series of meetings among ministers, government and civil society members, parliamentary discussion sessions have happened during the span of the IAC movement. Just as the IAC organiser played an important role in sharing information on various platforms of the media, similarly several academicians, thinkers and activists voiced their opinions through several platforms and helped in further opinion formation of the people. Efforts at Incorporating peoples' suggestions and opinions were made both by the CSOs as well as the government.

Apart from several discussions among active IAC members in drafting the Lokpal Bill, citizen participation in discussion forums happened throughout the process. But what set the IAC movement apart was the public deliberation that took place online. The IAC had its own online discussion forums (DF) dedicated for discussions on pre moderated forum topics with its own set of structural features and restrictions. Discussions happened on the IAC social media platforms and several other social media pages created for the purpose by supporters. Discussions triggered by television or newspaper media in their own online platforms also became sites for deliberations and discussions. Studying the quality and efficacy of such a vast amount of deliberation with a direct fallout on the outcome of the law making process would need a systematic study incorporating elaborate data

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mining as well discourse analysis methodologies. In this study assumptions about deliberation is purely based on the quantity of participation at the various platforms meant for deliberation (offline and online). Efforts by government at incorporating peoples' suggestions were mostly routine gesture. Committee reports inviting public suggestions got published in national gazette with very short time for response. There was lack of structured processes exhibiting transparency in methods of streamlining suggestions.

As a result of the public deliberations and the entire process happening mostly in the media, awareness about the points of conflict between the stakeholders was high. But for the same reason of the too much attention garnered from mobilizing support base online and the "action-reaction" drama between the government and the CSO captured nonstop in the media, led to complete undermining of the process of consensus building.

Policy outcome. On 27 December 2011, the Lok Sabha, Parliament's lower house, approved the government's latest version of the bill, which Hazare thought was still too weak. He began another hunger strike in Mumbai to protest the government moving forward with the weaker Lokpal bill with a marked fall in the supporting crowd. Hazare ended his third hunger strike, claiming health concerns, shortly after the Lok Sabha passed a weaker version of the Lokpal bill which never got passed by the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India's Parliament.

Awareness and operational continuity. It could be said based on the mobilization (through online and offline measures) of support base of IAC and the media attention received, that the awareness about the Lokpal Bill might have been high. But what was at the highest of peoples' recall was the aspect of overall corruption in the government and its system. This awareness could be attributed to both the background of the IAC movement as well as the movement itself. Extrapolating the effect of this awareness could help analysing the results of the following General Elections in the country in 2014 ousting the incumbent INC (Indian National Congress) Party charged with several cor-

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ruption scams, the Delhi assembly elections results on two consecutive occasions with the remarkable victory of the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) party – largely drawing its voter base from the IAC movement supporters and media attention. The Lokpal Bill since is yet to be reintroduced in the parliament with only mention of its forthcoming possible introduction in the Delhi state assembly (as this essay is getting written) after cabinet approval under AAP government.

NET NEUTRALITY MOVEMENT

Background and brief outline of the movement

India has recently made efforts at consultative policy-making in the context of net neutrality²⁴. The Department of Telecommunications²⁵ had decided to call for public comment and response to a committee report submitted with the department that was made public. This has been viewed by the people as a positive move by the government towards transparent and accountable decision making process²⁶. However, the danger always lurks on such consultative processes getting overshadowed by the voice of the industry stakeholders. Citizens have so far shown overwhelming interest to contribute to the policy making process.

“Net neutrality, or the notion that internet service providers must treat all traffic as equal, became a topic of heated discussion after TRAI floated a consultation paper on “Regulatory Framework for Over-the-Top (OTT) Services” seeking comments from stakeholders” (timesofIndia.com 2015). The Internet Service Providers (ISP) operating in India have tried to introduce a scheme through which companies can pay the ISPs and have users browse their service free of data charges. The practice of allowing apps to be free of data charges to the consumer is called zero rating in telecom parlance. Net neutrality means users should be able to access all websites at the same speed and cost. Seeing this zero rating scheme as opposing net neutrality, activists have launched protests across India since April 2015 in order to create awareness among people about the principles of net neutrality.

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A 117 page paper published by the regulator Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), titled *Consultation Paper on Regulatory Framework for OTT services* was the trigger for the protest movement, not only creating awareness about net neutrality but also encouraging people to put forward their suggestions in response to the government's invitation to consultation on the issue. Thus even before the Telecom operator in India could go ahead with the new scheme launched by the ISPs, it had to withdraw it following public outrage. Net neutrality activists launched websites along with social media platforms to spread awareness. In one of the biggest online protests in India, internet users have sent more than 1.5 lakh emails over just a weekend to the telecom regulator asking to protect network neutrality in the country. At nearly 10 emails a minute, the pace of such emails have touched record speed flooding the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's inbox.

After having received millions of responses from the public so far, TRAI has once again issued invitation for consultation till December 2015, as this essay is getting written. This issue involves stakeholders from the private industry sector (unlike the previous two cases), along with the government and its agencies and the citizens represented by various CSOs and activist groups.

Structural elements

Purpose. The main objective of the protest movement was to oppose the launch of the zero rating scheme by various ISPs in India that would allow tie ups between content providers and ISPs thus leading to differential treatment of content without the users' discretion. Thus among other net neutrality issues, the principle objective of this movement had been to address the net neutrality issue from a tariff perspective and thus demand the passing of regulations on discriminatory pricing of data services.

Organizing body. It would be interesting to note that there is no single organization that has come out as the representative organiza-

tion putting forward peoples' interests. A few activist groups like net-neutrality.in and savetheinternet.in have been spreading the awareness encouraging people to respond to Government's consultation paper. But as such there is no single representative body interfacing among the stakeholders regarding the policy legislation.

Strategies. This case is most interesting as the stakeholders, across the internet CSOs as well as industry bodies, have tried to get across their point of view to the public and solicit their support using various media platforms – especially social media. “A video on net neutrality by a leading comedy group went viral in much the same way that British comedian John Oliver's show on net neutrality changed the debate in the US last June, and flooded the US regulator with user support for net neutrality” (BBC 2015).

The forums like savetheinternet.in have tried getting the people to respond with petition letters and emails against the scheme. They have also tried getting maximum number of people to write their suggestions to the government.

The government's response to the initial protest was quick and appropriate in the sense that it immediately issued invitation for both closed consultation with expert groups as well as public response to the consultation paper published by its telecom regulatory body. This helped the protest from going beyond control and establishing the legitimacy of the government's efforts in terms of transparency and support and bought time for the government to respond with policy decisions. The strategic communication efforts by the industry bodies, especially of the likes of Facebook from changing the name of its content platform from network.org to free basics and reaching out to the citizens through various media platforms soliciting their support are some of the efforts first of its kind in India, as far as collaborative policymaking processes are concerned.

Goal Attainment

Mobilization. The initial net neutrality activism, through various activists' groups propelled by some of the traditional media houses themselves, resulted in mass outrage that stopped the launch of the zero rating schemes. Following this, the spreading of awareness through social media platforms, (sometimes the same platforms who are stakeholders in the legislation), among the average user about the principle of net neutrality led to overwhelming response to the government consultation paper. Thus this movement has exhibited an overall atmosphere of responsiveness and efforts to rule out perceptions of opaqueness from the process of policy making on the parts of all the stakeholders. Paradoxically, social media itself has created the need to maintain such transparency and responsiveness even for social media industry stakeholders themselves. The sheer volume of user response, has taken the operators, the regulator and even the activists by surprise.

Fostering deliberation. The Net neutrality movement in India is all about deliberation and perhaps has paved the path for such forms of pre legislation of laws and policies in the future. Apart from the protests, there has been overall a very high quantity of setting up of sites (offline as well as online) for deliberation to take place, opinions to be formed and exchanged. The follow-up papers published by the TRAI reflect that many perspectives were invited and incorporated.

Policy outcome. The net neutrality policy making is still an ongoing process and the constant exchange of information by the various parties involved is making it an interesting act of decision making, checking it from getting polarised and at the same time building towards consensus. As this essay is getting written, the outcome of the movement has already been a victory for the movement organisers taking into account the fact that the TRAI passed the regulation banning "zero rating" and thus the related practice of differential pricing.

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Awareness and operational continuity. The net neutrality issue mostly involves the further penetration of internet in India, which means the first time internet users of the huge rural and remote population of India. However, at the moment, given the technical literacy and resource required to be able to form opinions on the legislation of such policies rests mostly with the tech savvy, English speaking, educated urban population of the India. For the moment it is their expertise and preparedness that will shape the communication policy of India.

OBSERVATIONS ON PARTICULAR FEATURES AND INFERENCES

Observations on particular features

The three social movements analysed through the three case studies reveal the varying level of use of internet and social media. Thus in this section an effort is made to explore the possibilities of inferentially correlating the independent variable of internet and social media use with the dependent variable of Goal Attainment.

Based on internet penetration data as well as use of internet and social media data during the three movements, the use of internet and social media was the least during the RTI movement, with a massive increase in its use during the IAC movement and the maximum amount of adoption (qualitatively) during the ongoing Net neutrality movement.

Goal Attainment

Mobilization. RTI Movement mostly used methods of mass meetings and rallies for mobilization. There was strategic use of mobilization techniques at different stages of the process depending on the requirement for pressure to be created for the purpose of resolving issues. The mobilization of the masses and that of expert groups differed depending on the stage of the policy making process.

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The IAC movement involved extensive use of both offline as well as online mobilization techniques. Often the real world actions and the online engagements influenced each other. There were hardly any discernible stages of articulation and formulation affecting the corresponding mobilization accordingly. Instead there was a continuous mobilization to keep the support base growing irrespective of the need of the law making process. The mobilization throughout the movement aimed at including the largest possible support base, through various means of communication and especially through the digital medium, irrespective of the level of expertise or skill set required in contributing to the drafting process.

The NN movement mostly used the internet and social media to mobilise the average citizen for participation. This is the movement where even the industry representative bodies, like Facebook with its Free Basics services have come out with their own methods of reaching the citizens and mobilizing them, although the legality of such practices are in question now and has opened up a whole new aspect within internet governance²⁷. As regulated by the time to time invitation by the government regulator for consultation, the drafting process is clearly showing signs of moving from stage to stage through articulation towards formulation. As a result, mobilization has been high during times of the invitation followed by a lull while awaiting the government report with its response. The process so far has revealed the high mobilization of all possible users and the power of their feedback on the drafting process. However, there have been instances of closed group consultations of expert groups representing the stakeholders.

Deliberation. The RTI movement mostly allowed deliberation opportunity at meetings and public hearings for the average citizen and consultation meetings and conferences for expert groups. The IAC movement had its expert group discussion but for the average citizen most of the opportunity lay in internet and social media forums with various forms of engagement methods. The NN movement has so far offered the most structured methods for deliberation and ex-

change of suggestions and feedback through the use of internet and social media.

Policy outcome. The RTI movement resulted in the enactment of the RTI Act in 2005. The IAC movement resulted in passing the bill in the lower house but never getting passed in the upper house. The NN movement resulted in the passing of the regulation banning differential pricing of data services as was demanded by the movement organisers.

Awareness and operational continuity. Based on impact evaluation reports published by the government of India as well as private independent researchers, both the awareness for RTI as well as much of its implementation has been low among general mass of citizens with the CSOs making efforts at spreading awareness and information about it. The CSOs have been at work at stalling efforts to amend the law and also furthering the substantive value of the law. The IAC movement has fizzled out with hardly any effective work so far on looking into resurgence of the drafting process. The awareness about corruption has however had electoral outcomes for the movement organisers who chose to join active politics. The NN movement has continued to remain connected through the internet and social media, maintaining the high awareness among people about the issue at hand. In the Net neutrality movement, the traditional media itself being part of the stakeholder group along with other industry members and the government, has collaborated on keeping the process open ended so far.

Inferences. The support base created by social movements through social media gives newer incentives for participation for stakeholders. Protesters show their solidarity through participation, the organisers in turn gain credibility and legitimacy. The other affected stakeholders, mainly the government participate or get into dialogue mostly because they are bound to do so under the increased pressure of public demand.

Just as internet and social media create conditions for responsiveness in a positive way, it also undermines the complexities of the pro-

cesses of policy making by treating it with the same expectation of instant response like everything else on the internet gets treated with.

Internet and social media has opened up participation in social movement for citizens across cross section of the population. This has the potential of affecting the overall quality of consultation process with over consultation. Also the quantity of feedback increases the workload of already overloaded working groups. Remote participation, through digital media has however created a sense of inclusiveness that has strongly started complementing on-site participation.

Internet and social media use has increased the opportunity to seek greater transparency by social movement organisers from the other stakeholders. Just as activities surrounding social movements in the age of social media get documented by default, stakeholders take proactive measures to maintain at least the perception of transparency through sharing of information, the absence of which could get their credibility into question.

Social movements are organised in order to demand changes in policies and laws. Such policy or law making or altering processes are extremely complex processes which are often undermined by the informality of engagement offered on the internet and social media. Striking a balance in the rules of engagement would be necessary in the use of open consultations on the internet.

Internet and social media adds on to undue attention to social movement issues sometimes to the extent that the consulting bodies find it mandatory to stick to their polarised positions in order to maintain their support base, whose interest they represent. As a result, accommodating each other's concerns as well as consensus building or conflict resolution get negatively affected in such public decision making processes. Too many opinions and uncontrolled expression of mood and attitude give rise to environment of distrust among the stakeholders.

With the use of open platforms, especially the social media in the consultation process, the strategic and technical aspects of decision making become hard to separate. There is reason to believe that most policies and laws that are as important as to have triggered social movements, often are meant to effect in shifting balance of power. In



such a scenario, it is extremely vital to treat the interests of the different stakeholders in relation to the policy outcome internally with clarity. However open consultation processes have led to the undue attention to the strategic interests of the stakeholders by the media (which suits their logic), with the technical details of the law getting diluted or delayed and thus affecting the final outcome of the policy making process.

The social movements, through their open participation processes have led to generation of knowledge. Public reflection on specific subject matters by means of assembling many experts, competencies, and perspectives facilitates the creation of a knowledge base, which can lead to informed decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Internet and social media have given new strength to social activism and in the process have laid the path for a new form of governance model – open, consultative and inclusive. But such open consultative process could in one hand be a way to gain legitimacy in terms of transparency and support by the government and also find a pretext to cause delay in a process that needs speedy solutions. This calls for greater responsibility on the part of the citizens to develop the skills and ability to devote time to researched inputs, a continued willingness and promptness to engage and remain open to others' points of view.

Based on the above analysis, it could be said that consultative process of policy making has been introduced to the citizens of India and with the growing impact of communication technology, it is only going to get better. Internet and social media, along with increasing the ability to organise social movements with greater logistical ease, efficiency and impact, have also led to the introduction of deliberative process that generate knowledge and learning among affected citizens, and a process that could integrate expertise at various levels and keep moving towards the desired outcome. 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 in order to have meaningful outcomes, not just in terms of policy outcome but in ensuring democratic safeguards. Thus, just as there is need for structure in the newly emerged methods of governance and policy making, the optimism surrounding the use of internet and social media tools needs to be treated with caution in terms of the skill development required for the citizens to utilise these tools with enhanced knowledge and responsibility.

NOTES

¹ The Internet, referring to the specific global system of interconnected IP networks, is a proper noun and written with an initial capital letter. In the media and common use, it is often not capitalised, viz. the internet. In this research the word is not capitalised.

² Indirect access would mean having information on what is happening online through traditional media reportage as well as other informal sources.

³ The case studies are conducted in detail by the researcher including other parameters of enquiry. The detail case studies are available with the researcher on request.

⁴ Internet is mentioned along with social media throughout the essay as “internet and social media” in order to include platforms like online discussion forums, newspaper and television comments pages, that are not social media but have been extensively used during social movements.

⁵ All data is available in the detailed version of the case studies.

⁶ Structure of platforms would mean the public rallies, or meetings in the physical world and various discussion forums or social media pages in the online world.

⁷ Civil Society Organization has been mentioned henceforth as CSO.

⁸ See: Global trends on the right to information: a survey of south Asia, (Article 19, CHRI, CPA, HRCP: ISBN 1 902598 44 x, July 2013), <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/south-asia-foi-survey.pdf>.

⁹ A subnational state of India.

¹⁰ See <http://www.mkssindia.org>.

¹¹ See: <http://ncpri.mkssindia.org>.

¹² There have been several drafts been made before this but this was the first formal one that reached the government. In 1993, a draft RTI law was proposed by the Consumer Education and Research Council, Ahmedabad (CERC). In 1996, the Press Council of India headed by Justice P B Sawant presented a draft model law on the right to information to the Government of India. The draft model law was later updated and renamed the PCI-NIRD Freedom of Information Bill 1997. None of the draft laws were seriously considered by the Government. See: http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=84.

¹³ The Press Council of India is a statutory body in India that governs the conduct of the print media. At: <http://presscouncil.nic.in>.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/india.htm>.

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¹⁵ The Freedom of information act, as passed by Parliament in 2002, had the provision that it would come into effect from the date notified. However, in the final Act that was passed this date was not notified and therefore the Act did not come into effect.

¹⁶ Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance(NDA) came to power at Center in 1998; NDA returns to power in 1999; and Congress led United Progressive Alliance(UPA) came to power in 2004.

¹⁷ A method of public hearing where people affected by inefficiencies in government services publicly hold the erring official accountable for his actions in the presence of a neutral convenor. See: <http://www.mkssindia.org/writings/mkssandrti/the-right-to-information-discourse-in-india-%E2%80%93-neelabh-misra>.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.mkssindia.org/writings/mkssandrti/chronology-of-events-relating-to-rti-1294-599/>.

¹⁹ See: <http://rti.gov.in/rticorner/studybyppwc/index-study.htm>.

²⁰ The Times of India, "Activists meet PM to protest against RTI amendments", (New Delhi, August 19, 2013), <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Activists-meet-PM-to-protest-against-RTI-amendments/movie-review/21919587.cms>.

²¹ Social Media Posts, IAC statements were cross posted across online forums and traditional media for maximum coverage. The strategy for online media was different from the traditional media platforms.

²² Voluntary Arrest.

²³ See: How Web 2.0 Responded to Hazare [http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/how-web-20-responded-to-hazare/ article1685157](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/how-web-20-responded-to-hazare/article1685157).

²⁴ As of now there are no net neutrality laws in India. Recent incidents of its violation have led to citizen activism with the government showing signs of incorporating multi-stakeholder model of governance in the policymaking process.

²⁵ The Department of Telecommunications, abbreviated to DoT, is part of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of the executive branch of the Government of India.

²⁶ The Hindu, "Yes to Multistakeholderism", The Hindu (July 20, 2015) <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/on-multistakeholder-governance-of-the-internet/article7440857.ece#comments>.

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