

# Overview: Resistance Digitising

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The current farmers' protests in the capital of the country, against the farm acts is a manifestation of the resistance mode of citizenship. This is done through community level organising, and through organised calls for protest. But with the advent of digital technologies, the nature of resistance movements has experienced significant change.

Lately, resistance movements have been characterised as citizenship protests where individuals or groups voice out their concerns against the state occupying a physical space, thereby asserting their rights. Beyond the specific political demands that each movement articulates, such movements are characterised by a strong and solid social base, and by individuals sharing the same ideological beliefs, nation, cultural and social conditions.

The 'repertoire of contention' (tools, actions) in the ongoing protests have been mostly of conventional nature, including but not limited to sit-ins, rallies, strikes, statements to the media etc. These have been additionally bolstered by the use of digital technologies.

Here digital technologies have an impact in amplifying the message. While it may have played a role in collectivising and mobilising people in the physical space, instantaneous information dissemination happening in the online space widens the reach and, through that, resonance of protests. Besides, digital technologies and social media have also been helpful in distributing messages to wide sections of the society, allowing for instant feedback and engagement. Another interesting advantage offered by the digital technologies is the globalisation of movements and causes, due to the global nature of the digital domains. This could be seen in this particular case too, when Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres commented on the farmer protests in India.

However, the conventional offline mode of resistance buttressed by the digital technologies is not without its perils - online mobilisation is often substituted for offline work. From an individual perspective, recording your opinion in social media accords a false sense of completion, thus obviating the need for ground engagement.

A college student in a rural part of Tamil Nadu would be tweeting about the farmer protests in Punjab. The student's socio-economic place of context is emotionally distant to the Punjabi farmer. But since digital technologies offer the student an avenue to voice out their opinion, this has led to people participating in causes where the emotional distance between the issue and the citizens is large. Such kind of clicktivist practices have made the offline activism space underwhelming.

The other mammoth peril is with the hypervisibility offered by data aggregation. The state could use surveillance processes to punish dissenters, and counter-mobilise public opinion through its own channels of information dissemination, including social media. This can lead to resistance movements becoming de-legitimised, and place the lives and security of individuals and organisations at risk.

In the offline world, finding connections and building networks is hard for citizens and civil society organisations because of the high costs involved and restricted means of reaching other people. Geography and resources limit the scope of networks. However, digital technologies, social media and platforms with specific sectoral and societal aims, can enable these connections far better, thus creating communities of common concern. The potential of digital technologies to allow these organisations to form an unified counter to the political class is yet to be explored.

A more robust civil society is one which has active and engaged communities in place. Though digital technologies can serve the function of being an enabler and amplifier for processes, they can never replace interactions and practices in physical spaces. In this context, it becomes important to ponder upon the transformation of the resistance movements in the 21st century and its impact on the expressions of citizenship.

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