CHAPTER-4
SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACTIVISM

This chapter explores the role of social media in social activism. The chapter begins by defining the concept of social media and its technical affordances and popularity. The question of whether Internet can act as a public sphere is discussed along with the mobilising capacity of social media especially its role in social movements worldwide. Arab spring revolution and other such movements trace their success to the pivotal role played by social media. Within the Indian context it has emerged as an important medium for generating and endorsing political opinion and has also been put to use by groups for harnessing and garnering support for their causes(e.g. by feminists or various caste groups).

Social Media

The term social media generally include social network and micro-blogging sites (like Facebook and Twitter), peer-production communities (e.g. Wikipedia), content sharing and discussion forums (e.g., YouTube, Reddit) and online dating sites (e.g., Match.com, eHarmony). However many of these platforms are converging and now support multiple kind of activities. Kaplan et al. (2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. The growing availability of high speed Internet access further lead to the popularising of the concept. Kaplan writes that “Web 2.0 describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. While applications such as personal web pages, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, and the idea of content publishing belong to the era of Web 1.0, they are replaced by blogs, wikis, and collaborative projects in Web 2.0.”(Kaplan et. al, 2010:61).

Another term that is associated with this is the User Generated Content (UGC). If Web 2.0 represent the ideological and technological foundation then the User Generated Content can be seen as sum total of all the ways in which people make use of Social
Media. Though User Generated Content was a there to prior of Web2.0 but scale and magnitude of its presence because of technological drivers like increased broadband connectivity, economic drivers like increased availability of tools for the creation of UGC and social drivers like rise of generation of “digital natives” or netizens: a group of young people with substantial technical know-how and willingness to engage online, makes this fundamentally different from era of Web 1.0.

Though technically the term “social-media” refer to wide array of media that enable sociality but it has to do more with its cultural positioning than its technological affordances. Web2.0 and its first offering social media provided a change to start anew the Internet after its dot-com burst. So social media helped engineers, entrepreneurs and everyday people reimagine the role that technology could play in information dissemination, community development and communication. It was the understanding that the technologies that matter people or that help people to connect, collaborate, socialize and coordinate, will set the path right. (boyd, 2015)

Based on the parameters of the extent to which various types of social media allows for social presence/media richness and self-presentation/ self-disclosure social media(Kaplan et al., 2010) can be categorised into five broad categories

1. Blogs: - These are the earliest form of social media, they kind of personal web pages and have multitude of variations from personal diaries to some relevant content in particular area.
2. Collaborative projects: - These projects enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users e.g. Wikipedia.
3. Social networking sites: - These are the applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles and inviting others to have access to these profile e.g., Facebook.
4. Content communities: - The main objective of these communities to share media content among users of different types like text, photos (e.g. Flickr), videos (e.g., YouTube) etc.
5. Virtual worlds: - They are the platforms that replicate three-dimensional environment in which users appear in the form of personalised avatars and interact with each other as they would in real life. They can be further divided into two types the virtual game world, which requires users to behave according to strict rules in the context of massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) and second is
the virtual social worlds, which allows users to choose their behaviour more freely and essentially live a virtual life similar to real life e.g., Second life application.

**Affordances of social media**

The idea of social media is considered to be stronger which is going to stay way beyond the life and times of a particular site. The paradigm of ‘affordances’ in terms of what this media allow/afford to its users is considered to be an approach which would help towards a better understanding of the media rather than by just explaining a particular site. Also this will produce a body of work which will continue to be relevant even after these sites get altered or disappear altogether. boyd(2011) lists four structural affordances of persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability, of social network sites which empower it to become networked public. *Persistence* means that the online expressions are automatically recorded and archived. *Replicability* allows that the content made out of bits can be duplicated. *Scalability* means the potential visibility of content in networked publics is great. With the help of *Searchability* the content in networked publics can be accessed through search. Similarly Vitak and Ellison (2015) lists the affordances of social media as visibility which makes easier for the users of social media to make previously invisible information visible. Second is the persistence or reviewability which refers to accessibility of content, third is the editability which refers to asynchronous nature of communication which allows user to carefully craft message before posting and last is the association which refers to both the articulated connections between the users and the connection between the users and the content they post.

What makes “social media” significant as a category is not the technology but rather the socio-technical dynamics that unfolded as millions of people embraced the technology and used it to collaborate, share information, and socialize. Popular genres of social media integrated the public nature of interest-driven CMC with the more intimate dynamics of interpersonal CMC. Also SNSs have become a genre of social media that lowers barriers to communication, facilitates the display of identity information, and enables like-minded individuals to easily discern their common ground, thus helping users cultivate socially relevant interactions (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011).

These social networking sites have emerged as living spaces connecting people to voice their emotions and concerns in relatively low-cost manner and in doing so they can
transcend space and time. Users co-evolve in this process of permanent, multiple interaction but in fact choosing the terms of their co-evolution (Castells, 2014). Today most of the work organizations, marketers, service agencies, government and civil society are oriented towards being part of these social networking sites rather than setting up alternative sites so as to be more and more part of the networks that people construct by themselves for themselves. A whole new category of professionals recognised as Social networking entrepreneurs has come to fore, some of whom have become billionaires in the process. As Castells puts forth that SNS are often a business but they are in the business of selling freedom, free expression, chosen sociability.

Usage and popularity of Social media:-

According to a blog about social media usage in India (blog.digitalinsights.in) India will have around 500 million internet users by 2018. Indians are very active on different social networks and 88% of users share content on their social profiles. Facebook is the most browsed social network on social media and more than 80% of the users access it via mobile phone. Other popular sites are Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Instagram (ironically there are more men on Instagram than women ratio being 75:25). The most shared type of video is film or movie trailers. If we look at the American example the Pew internet survey report of America titled Social media usage: 2005-15 by A. Perrin (2015) suggest that 65% of adults use social networking sites almost tenfold jump from the past decade. Among the young adults (18 to 29) the usage is almost 90%. Usage among those 65 years and older has more than trebled since 2010 when 11% used social media, now it is 35% in 2105. Women are more likely than men to use social networking sites though the gap is narrowing up 68% of all women use social media as compared to 62% of all men. Those with higher education level and household income use more of social media. Those living in rural areas are less likely than those in suburban and urban communities to use social media. In case of America 58% rural residents, 68% of suburban residents and 64% of urban residents use social media. So this might provide some cues for the future growth and trends of social media usage in India. Although at present it is more youthful and male dominated.

Social Media and Activism:-

Before getting into the details on how social media has turned out to be an important medium for the contemporary social movements/activism, let’s examine the question
can internet become a public sphere given its differences and peculiarities from the traditional mediums?

**Internet as a public sphere**

Habermas traced the development of public sphere in the 17th and 18th century, he saw it as a domain of social life in which public opinion could be formed out of rational public debate and consequently informed and logical discussion could lead to public agreement and decision making, thereby representing the best of the democratic tradition. Scholars also opine of erosion of public sphere with the advent of modern industrial society.

Although Habermas conception of public sphere was somewhat idealized since the democratic structure throughout ages has excluded many voices, the most obvious being women and lower classes. However Lyotard’s critique (1984) of Habermas public sphere stresses on the point that individuality, anarchy and disagreement rather than rational accord lead to true democratic emancipation. Frazer (1992) also opined that public sphere functioned merely as a realm for privileged men to practise their skills of governance. Her conception of counter-publics, a space carved out by people excluded from the main/dominant public sphere is quite noteworthy. For her multiple public spheres of multiple counter publics are formed in response to their exclusion from the dominant sphere of debate. So multiple public spheres exist, which are not equally powerful which give voices to collective identities and interests.

Other critics ascertain other reasons for the decline of true public sphere like Carey (1995) believe that capitalism created a mass commercial culture that has replaced the public sphere and Putman (1996) noted a decline of interest in civic life among Americans due to their overdose of television which not only takes much of their time but also induces passive outlooks.

Places such as the ancient Greek agora, the New England town hall, the local church, the coffeehouse, the village square, and even the street corner have been arenas for debate on public affairs and society have been considered in Western civilization as arenas of public. The ‘public opinion’ slowly formed within these sphere became the context in which politics was framed. With the passage of time these have been replaced by television and other forms of media. The argument now looks at the
Internet newsgroups, MOOs, and other virtual communities as nascent public spheres that will renew democracy in the 21st century.

Poster (2001) while examining whether the Internet can emerge as a public sphere, considers these disembodied exchanges of video text as not a substitute for face-to-face meeting. Taking the example of Usenet, he sees it as a place where identities are amorphous and rational argument never prevail on these platforms and achieving a consensus is widely impossible. He reasons this is due to how identities are constructed on these platforms, where people construct their own identities irrespective of the traditional identity of individual which is rooted in his physical body. For him this kind of protean identity is not consonant with forming a stable political community. Dissent on the Net does not lead to consensus: it creates the profusion of different views and without embodied co-presence, the charisma and status of individuals have no force. Since on the Internet, identities are mobile, dissent is encouraged, and in the absence of "normal" status markers, it is in fact a very different social "space" from that of the public sphere.

Although this argument given by Poster was at the time when such groups were just in their inception period and the case of "protean identity" might have changed given the larger presence of individuals on the social media with their real identities, the scenario definitely needs a re-examination. Also exponents who are sceptical focus on how Internet have benefits for the have’s and disadvantages for the have not. One's having access to internet, for them it is a valuable resource for political information and participation. So it is not equally and universally available and hence this alludes the possibility of internet to be a public sphere. Moving political discussion to a virtual space excludes those with no access and connectivity and so does not ensure that Internet to be a more representative and robust public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Even access to internet does not guarantee increased political activity or enlightened political discourse.

But then there have been an increased scholarly conviction barring some serious limitations that Internet holds possibilities for future discourses. Papacharrissi opined that internet is public sphere in the making but definitely emerged as important public space “… that a new public space is not synonymous with a new public sphere. As public space, the internet provides yet another forum for public deliberation. As public sphere, the internet could facilitate discussion that promotes a democratic exchange of
ideas and opinion. A virtual space enhances discussion; a virtual sphere enhances democracy” (Papacharissi, 2002: 11).

It clearly has emerged as an important platform despite its limitations of being accessible to select few. The online spaces have been especially relevant for constructing counter-culture. Frazer conception of counter-culture clearly paraphrases the use of internet and specially the social networking websites as a medium for providing voices to marginalised groups. Internet always work to the advantage of underdogs, the ones who don’t find enough space in the dominant media. Internet has the possibility to connect people from diverse backgrounds and provide forum for public discussion. Apart from being a means for individual social networking, Facebook and such networking platforms are emerging as powerful mediums for social activism giving voices to not only mainstream issues but also to those concerns which are marginalised or relegated to the periphery by the mainstream media.

New Social Movements and the Internet

This part deals with how social media and SNSs particularly have become important and inseparable to the work and times of new social movements. The new social movements not only ideologically distinct themselves from the old social movements but are also distinct in the ways and means of their collective action and modes of carrying the movement further. In the first decade of twenty first century there have been many social movements across the world that have used the power of Internet as their space of formation and as a means to connect among people of the movement and with the society at large. In fact the Internet and social networking sites on the Internet are the new rallying points of activists today. In the twentieth century electronic media are supporting an equally profound transformation of cultural identity. As Poster contends that telephone, radio, film, television, the computer and now their integration as "multimedia" reconfigure words, sounds and images so as to cultivate new configurations of individuality. If modern society may be said to foster an individual who is rational, autonomous, centered, and stable (the "reasonable man" of the law, the educated citizen of representative democracy, the calculating "economic man" of capitalism, the grade-defined student of public education), then perhaps a postmodern society is emerging which nurtures forms of identity different from, even opposite to those of modernity. And electronic communications technologies significantly enhance these postmodern possibilities(Poster, 1998).
The voices and concerns of individuals, require new mediums of expression or to put in other words these concerns were themselves the product of this new age whose psychological existential concerns (reflexive individual of Anthony Giddens or the schizophrenic of Deleuze and Guttari) find solace in the company of co-sailors(web-surfers) on the internet or the social-networking platforms social actors. Alain Touraine also suggest that it “in a post-industrial society, in which cultural services have replaced material goods at the core of production, it is the defence of subject , in its personality and in its culture , against the logic of apparatuses and markets, that replaces the idea of class struggle”(Castells 1996: 22)

Some of the prominent cyber activism movements include anti-war, anti-globalization and global justice movements. Though these movements are rooted in the context of exploitation and oppression which were not able to challenge the state but are now powered by tools of mass self-communication. Technology may not have induced the movement but without the technology (internet and wireless communication) social movement would not take the present form of being a challenge to state power. As castells argues that “technology is a material culture and internet materialized the culture of freedom…this culture-made technology is at the source of the new wave of social movements that exemplify the depth of the global impact of the Internet in all spheres of social organization, affecting particularly power relationships, the foundations of institutions of society.(Castells ,2014: 21).

Facebook has now become one of the first places dissatisfied people worldwide take their gripes, activism, and protests. These campaigns on Facebook work well because its viral communications tools enable large numbers to become aware of an issue and join together quickly. Some of the prominent movements where social media played a pivotal role are described in the following pages:-

**The Arab Spring**

The last decade has seen emergence of digital technology as a key tool in organising protest and expressing discontent. The Arab Spring uprising in 2011 actually came to be termed as the social media revolution (Eltantawy and Weist 2011; Skinner 2011) because of the key role played by Facebook in organizing and sustaining protests. Similarly the recent revolt in Egypt to outset the Hosni Mubarak regime has attracted lot of scholarly attention and some even term it as "the first Internet
Revolution" (Xiaolin, Wellman, Yu, 2011). The example of Egypt carries greater relevance because it is considered as relatively traditional Arab society but even here we see the manifestation of the “triple revolution” that happened in Western societies: 1) the turn to social networks; 2) the proliferation of the far-flung instantaneous internet; 3) the even wider proliferation of always-available mobile phones. It is through these platforms that activists get information about protests and rallies.

The Arab Spring began in late 2010 in response to the oppressive regimes and a low standard of living beginning with protests in Tunisia. Many media reports have heralded social media as the driving force behind the swift spread of revolution throughout the world, as new protests appear in response to success stories shared from those taking place in other countries. Social media proved to be a significant resource for the Egyptian revolution which was effectively utilized by the activists. Off late Egyptian government efforts to expand nations information technology capabilities as a tool of socioeconomic development resulted in substantial access to social media among Egyptians where more than 21% of Egyptian population had access to internet and there were more than 4.5 million Facebook users in 2011 and 70% of the population had a mobile phone subscription. The early 2000’s saw emergence of many Egyptian bloggers writing about crucial issues. These blogs in the beginning were mainly published in English but with the development of Arabic software, it encouraged creation of more blogs in Arabic. Subsequently the rise of blogosphere saw activists using other social media platforms like Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and other communication technologies chiefly the cellular phones. April 2008 marked the first cyber activism attempt by Egyptians in which activists created a Facebook page to join textile workers in Mahalla on general strike. Although not too successful as the page attracted 70,000 supporters and the strike was harshly defeated by the security forces but the experience and knowledge gained in this early social media trial proved quite useful in the 2011 protests and subsequent revolution.

Another individual that contributed the Egyptian revolution via social media technology was Omar Afifi, a former police-officer-turned-activist. While in asylum in United States he released several series of detailed YouTube videos instructing Egyptians on techniques for conducting their own revolution. He provided numerous details and specified the exact day of revolt, where protesters should gather and what they should wear.
It was also through the social media, Egyptians carefully watched events unfolding in Tunisia while also planning their own movement activists from both the countries exchanged ideas, information and words of encouragement. There were messages and words of advice on safety issues by Tunisian counterparts which was posted by Egyptians on their blogs and Facebook pages. Tunisian protesters advised their Egyptian counterparts to protest at night time for safety, to avoid suicide operations, to use media to convey their message for outside pressure, to spray-paint security forces’ armoured vehicles black, to cover the windshield, and to wash their faces with Coca-cola to reduce the impact of tear gas. Many Egyptian activists used cell phones to send immediate SOS tweets for help. Other activists used Twitter and Facebook to generate international attention and interest in the revolution by posting pictures and videos depicting revolution events and updates, as well as information about police torture of protesters.

Another study on Tunisian and Egyptian uprising (Lotan et al., 2011), the researchers analysed the flow of information on Twitter during the week around the uprising. They tried to identify the types of users who posted regularly who are termed as “key actor types” and the ones who engaged in the subject. They argued that news was co-created by the bloggers and activists alongside journalists and opined that Twitter re-creates journalism as a conversation rather than an expert telling the story.

Another set of scholars view social media as an important resource for collective action and the organization of contemporary social movements (Eltantawy et al., 2011). While drawing upon resource mobilization theory they argue that social media technologies provide platform to harness important resources like time, money, organizational aspects and other opportunities that are critical to the success of social movements. In their analysis of Egyptian revolution in early 2011 they looked into the conditions and resources that sustained the anti-government protests that lead to Egyptian revolution and how social media technologies were employed as a resource to support the Egyptian revolution. It’s not just the presence of a social media (resource) but also actors (activists) efficacy in using it effectively which made social media as an important resource for the contemporary social movements. In the aftermath of Tunisian revolution which ended in the fall of President Zine El Abidine on January 15,2011 acted as an important pre cursor to Egyptian revolution which played the crucial role of an inspirational story which strengthened their sense of collective
identity and purpose mainly because the similarities in the oppressive conditions and the goals of the citizen-activist.

Use of social media by activists themselves also marked a significant development in social mobilization as it was the protesters themselves who disseminated the information, pictures and videos – and not just the reporters and group leaders. When the government banned reports from Tahrir Square in an effort to prevent news from spreading the world, social media technologies enabled protesters to become citizen journalists (Fisher, 2011).

Even the Mubarak regime realizing the power and speed of social media technologies and their extraordinary capacity for organization among activists called to cut off Internet and cellular phone communication across Egypt. Another form of social media support was series of virtual protests in support of Egyptian revolution. Also immediately after the announcement of Mubarak’s resignation social media was flooded with messages of joy and celebration.

The dynamism which social media lends to social movements is both unique and remarkable as the earlier technologies or methods (like use of leaflets, posters and faxes etc.) lacked the kind of speed and interactivity that social media affords. Its global outlook enable activists from world over to join social-networking groups, to follow events and engage in discussions.

The Occupy Movements in the United States began on September 17, 2011 called together by groups such as Adbusters and Anonymous. Inspired by the Arab Spring revolutions, protesters began camping in lower Manhattan to protest corporate greed and a resulting loss of financial wellbeing and opportunity for most of the population, as well as democratic representation by elected officials who are beholden to special interests. Protesters not only organised via social media but also shared insights with other protesters in real time and also learning from their experiences such as what to do to reduce the effects of tear gas. Learning from other protesters experiences and adapting this in real time was one of the great contributor to activists’ success (Skinner, 2010). It is suggested that protests are not just solely about social media; it is used as a tool to help connect protesters and relay message to the outside world, but the real power of the protest comes from the people wielding that tool.
SNSs and YouTube have become important sources of political information. The SNSs proved to be a more accurate predictor of political attitudes and behaviour. Individuals resorted to YouTube for obtaining political information, but tested out their political attitudes and behaviour on the interactive spaces of SNSs (Johnson et al., 2010).

Here we need to distinct between two situations; the one being where an offline activity or movement uses social media as a medium to reach out to people to garner support and disseminate information about its protest, rallies etc. and in doing so acting as a means for activists to network with each other, so here the digital technology is aiding the process of organising large group of people for a particular cause and second being social media in itself being used to create awareness and generate opinion about certain issues independent of any offline modes of action. In the latter case it is generally believed that such activities, devoid of any offline actions lead nowhere. Slacktivism, a derogatory way of defining online activism, which considers such online activisms as having no social and political effect but just make participants feel good about themselves. But scholars now are now contemplating to redefine the notion of ‘activism’ in the wake of forms and realms created by digital technology.

The Indian Context

The narratives on social media reflect and represent myriad forms, diversities and dynamics of Indian reality. This has profound influence on not just the way individuals socialize but the way community and society is organised. It has recognizable social, political and cultural implications. On this vibrant socially thriving media, the categories are contested, renegotiated, recreated and redefined. We find varied implications of social media in political, social and cultural realms.

Feminist Issues

The use of online spaces for feminist activism in India came to the limelight with the use of Facebook by Nisha Susan for the Pink Chaddi campaign. This marked the beginning of recognition of social media as an important tool for activism. The campaign was launched in 2009. Since then the digital technology has been used by Indian feminists for harnessing ad garnering support for number of feminist issues.

Cyberfeminism is the term that is used to refer to feminist activism online. Cyberfeminists aim to work towards the empowerment of women through technology.
They want to design websites and online spaces that will counter/resist the dominant construction of gender. They find internet as an important medium for feminist activism and research. They trace their theoretical roots to the framework provided by Donna Haraway (1991) in her seminal essay *Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the late twentieth century*.

In her research paper titled *From the streets of the web: Looking at Feminist Activism on Social media*, Sujatha Subramanian analysed the role of social media as a medium for enabling marginalised groups to form networks of solidarity. Feminist activists are exploring web spaces as arenas for rallying together. These online network spaces have provided space to individuals to share their stories with individuals of similar interest. Drawing upon Frazer’s conception of counter-publics, a response to the exclusionary nature of dominant public sphere, she considers that digital technology or the online platforms have been used by feminist activists to create counter-publics, which need to be studied independently of offline action. Online spaces provide spaces where women have been able to create ‘new subjectivities and relationships, and contest right-wing patriarchal control over their expression’ (*ibid*: 73). It also provides space for non-normative discourses such as discourse on pleasure. With the use of anonymity, women have been able to voice very private discussions which have not formed part of the mainstream like conversations around sexual pleasure. The conversations on a number Facebook pages and blogs extend to topics as body image or romantic relationships. For example a very popular blog in India for women is *Popxo* which is ‘about fashion, beauty, lifestyle- everything the modern Indian woman needs’ (www.facebook/popxo). This blog discusses issues which were never before discussed (or even considered to be a taboo) in the mainstream media.

This has especially worked well for the voices that were unheard and marginalised e.g. the people with disabilities. Also because of its affordability of anonymity individuals find these spaces as free from normative structures of real world. There are several websites dedicated to deconstruct every label that comes under it- pansexual, asexual, polysexual, agender, genderfluid. Similarly about the ‘people of color’. Women are redefining the notions of body image and Self–representation on online spaces. By resorting to alternate/independent aesthetic choices especially around self-representation women have ‘reclaimed their embodiment from the male gaze’ (Subramanian 2015). The act of taking selfies or self-portraits can to looked upon as
women assuming control over technology to mark a subjective performance of the self….challenges the authority of male gaze by collapsing the boundaries of actor and spectator’ (ibid :75).

Feminist activities in India have found these spaces to be extremely useful. Another such example is the Facebook group created by female intellectuals in Hyberabad named Hyderabad for feminism (HfF). This group is mostly located on Facebook although it does meet and conduct activities in public spaces. It has helped in the extension of discussions from within intellectual/activist and university spaces to the mainstream through social media. For example, with the HfF, although the majority of active members are university students, they also engage with feminism outside the geographical space of the university. This extension of activism through social media has also affected the way the mainstream media has been reacting to and reporting on issues of violence, gender and sexuality. The activism through social media also consist of sharing and carrying out discussions that contribute to the formation of opinions. These opinions, in turn, can generate enough pressure to affect the stance or language that mainstream media uses. Also as a result of being an online space and making use of this technology, the HfF was able to survive as an informal group without funding and with minimal self-funding for its functioning (Madabhushi, 2015).

There has been limitations to this medium as well, as these spaces lack inclusivity and are generally more elite and urban and work largely in an urban middle class setting and urban middle class morality and problems (Madabhushi, 2015). The language barriers also require an important mention, many individuals are more comfortable in expressing themselves in their mother tongue and have difficulty with the dominant language of the web (English). Often, mobile phones lack the technology to support different scripts just to cite the example of Gurmukhi script of Punjabi. In India the work of many dalit feminist writers on caste produced in native languages are often inaccessible to many users.

Nevertheless, social media has become an important platform for understanding sexual violence, sexism, fighting patriarchy and aligning with other movements. Online spaces are easier and faster to access and hence facilitate meaningful discussion around some very uncomfortable issues. Although it’s not that these platforms are devoid of sexist or misogynist environment that women come across offline. The internet democracy project’s report titled *Keeping women Safe? Gender, Online Harrasment and Indian*
Law, found that women who articulate strong opinions are most susceptible to be targeted with gendered and sexualized violence in online spaces. Online violence and harassment serve to limit women’s participation in online spaces and drive women offline. If you look at the global feminist discourse the Indian feminists sharing space with western feminists on online spaces, it is found that voices and expressions of women from third world countries are often silenced (Gajjala, 2000). Nevertheless, feminists do believe that they must occupy these spaces or otherwise it may end up being a male-dominated domain

2) Political Activism and the Indian context

Role and prowess of social media was fully proved and consolidated by the AAP victory of Delhi elections for the second time. Many media reports pointed to the successful campaign launched by AAP on social media as one of the reason behind its land sliding victory against BJP which was at its historic zenith by defeating the ten year old congress regime in the 2014 general elections under the much hyped and proclaimed persona of future and development of India, Narendra Modi. Even BJP harnessed the power of social media to its advantage in the 2014 general elections. Even though the use of traditional media like newspapers and television channels and common means of election mobilisation like rallies and mass meetings was there, both the campaigns of Congress and BJP candidly put to use a range of new media, from WhatsApp and Facebook to YouTube and Instagram.

The evolution of such political use of the media and social media in India was most successfully used in the Anna Hazare-led India against Corruption movement of 2011. “Team Anna”, as it was known, was quick to understand the crowd mobilizing potential of new media which, at that time largely included bulk SMSs and missed calls with some Twitter and Facebook presence. Anna Hazare had commented at that point that if “Mahatma Gandhi been alive today, I am sure he would have used this technology to reach out to the masses.”

When Arvind Kejriwal established the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) in November 2012, having lot of young bunch of volunteers well versed and well equipped in communication technologies, he clearly realized how this new(social) media, can be really useful, for not just carving out new political space but also for raising funds. First time when AAP harnessed this new medium was when it went to the polls in the
winter of 2013. Not only did each assembly constituency have its own Facebook page, some 60,000 tweets with pro-AAP hashtags reached Delhi voters before they cast their ballots on 4 December (Philipose, 2015). Similarly an array of social media proved to be extremely valuable for the BJP and its prime ministerial candidate when India went to polls in 2014.

Well for our current analysis I have taken some snapshots from the Facebook page of AAP. Arvind Khejriwal took to Facebook in Nov 2013 when he founded the AAP. As of now (May 2, 2016) it has 28, 14,052 (2.8 million) followers.

AAP Facebook page was founded on 26th November 2012 corresponding to the launch of AAP at Jantar Mantar on the same day. So from its very inception this Facebook page is acting as a true mouthpiece of the party. Since Aam Aadmi party in its official page endeavours to bring a radical change in way politics is practised in India it aims to bring the common man (Aam aadmi) into the political framework and this in a way means actually giving power to the people to govern themselves, which of course are the true principles on which the democracy is based. It shuns any form of communalism or dynastic politics which have become the order of politics in India where either the parties are right winged or are carrying the burden of dynasties where people, truly deserving to be in the leadership roles, are relegated, to the margins by the internal party politics. On the governance side Aam Aadmi party main issue is to fight corruption and to bring in more and more transparency and accountability in the affairs of the government.

On its official page (www.aamaadmiparty.org) while answering the question of their reason to enter the politics, it mentions that all the political parties today are ‘corrupt, greedy and thick skinned’ and it is time to bring political power back to the ‘people’s hand’. They define that their aim is not to come to power but to change the current corrupt and self-serving system of politics so that who so ever comes to power in future the system should be strong enough to withstand corruption at any level of governance. Their vision is to ‘realize the dream of SWARAJ that Gandhiji envisaged for free India—where the power of governance and rights of democracy will be in the hands of people of India’.

Defining their difference from other parties they laid down some strict rules in terms that criminal antecedents of the candidate will be strictly checked before issuing the
person the election ticket. No two members of the same family will be eligible to contest elections from AAP. No MLA or MP of AAP would use red lights or any other beacons on their vehicles or use any special security or would live in opulent and luxurious government houses. Also the party would adhere to complete financial transparency.

In fact if we look into the driving force behind the founding of the party it started with the Anna Hazare movement to pass the Jan Lokpall Bill. After series of protests and hunger strikes nothing substantial (in terms of any legislation) came out but it truly galvanized the people. It brought the anger of the common man against the prevailing political system and bureaucratic structure choked by corruption and immoral practises where the common man has no other viable option. In this scenario Arvind Kejriwal decided that instead of begging the present order to bring about change why not the people themselves enter into the public realm and get into the power structures to bring about the change they yearn for. So that led to the launching of AAP and a call to the common to come to Jantar Mantar on 26th November, 2012 and sign themselves as the founding members(AAP facebook page). So the transparency and openness which AAP stood for, clearly would find this social networking platforms as the rightful medium to reach out to the people as these mediums are the products of and themselves symbolize openness and free speech. Thus in this sense AAP party is carrying forward its mission not in closed doors but in the open public sphere. And what better medium to practise this than the social media. AAP and Arvind Kejriwal’s own Facebook page brings daily updates of all the activities of the party. The Facebook page is like an open forum where the opinions are shared and discussed and it truly comes across as a non-hierarchized medium

Placing his important decisions on the basis of getting referendum from the people has also been one thing that was never heard in Indian politics. Whether it was to form government with Congress support for the first time in Delhi when AAP lacked the total numbers or it was his resignation on the non-passage of Jan Lokpal Bill in the Delhi Vidhan Sabha. The Hindu in its editorial notes “the idea of a referendum itself was refreshing as a method of seeking the people's endorsement of the way forward in this complex situation. It is also a vital instrument of verifying public opinion that is missing from today’s democratic political practice in India”
After its formation AAP took cognizance of all the issues concerning people of Delhi. Their astute understanding of the conditions at the grass root level enabled them to come up with a very sound political agenda and plan of development of Delhi over next five years. Their election manifesto clearly marked them apart from their rivals and brought to fore their keenness, thorough understanding of people’s problems and their ability to come up with viable solutions in future. It also did finally help them to bring campaign closer to the people. For each issue they appointed a single person who eventually became in charge of the same department after they came to power. Again this form of role allocation, whereby a person most closely associated with the department was earmarked its responsibility, marked a significant turn where we had a political history of highly unqualified or least likeable being allocated important portfolios.

Some of the earlier messages were in the form of declaration to the rival political parties that AAP has arrived and it enjoys the support of the people.

“People across the country have started offering their houses & offices to Aam Aadmi Party!
This should answer all the questions being raised about 'How we will manage our party funds’.”(1 December, AAP Facebook timeline)

“After formation of party, first public meeting in Roha, Maharashtra. Huge crowds. People fed up of all parties. AAP is their only hope…We didn't bring people in trucks or buses. We don't have any money. They came on their own. Why did these thousands come on their own?.Farmers, laborers, rural folks, urban junta, youth, women.”(2dec)

“Nujal Islam and Mohd Khalid waited entire night on footpath in shivering cold just to become members of Aam Aadmi Party….They did not want to miss the opportunity to meet the owner of the van which sported the 'Aam Aadmi Party' poster as they thought he would make them member of the AAP…Kudos to their spirit! …It's the patriotism of people like them and you all which keeps the fire burning.”

After forming the government in Dehli for the first time. AAP’s Facebook page was loaded with messages of euphoria and it mentioned that “AAP's success has caused a ripple effect. In Rohtak, Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda's town, an office of the local AAP unit sprouted overnight. In Kochi, the party is set to launch its Kerala campaign by challenging the controversial Aranmula airport project. Several students in
IIM-Calcutta have started campaigning for AAP. And at least one IIT-Kharagpur student, inspired by alumnus Kejriwal, has decided to give up engineering and start voluntary work”.

Sociologist Dipankar Gupta offers a reason for the zeal. "Even when watching AAP from a distance, everyone felt they were part of the movement. Kejriwal and company have been inspirational nationwide,”(AAP Facebook timeline). Sounds of jubilance went from women in Mumbai’s local trains discussing how prices of essentials could fall, if AAP would come to power to kirtan singers celebrating their triumph and the most powerful voices were heard in the adjoining State of Punjab where Aam Aadmi Party's election symbol "broom" has struck a chord with municipal employees of Punjab with safai karamcharis openly declaring to support AAP if Punjab government fails to meet their demands. This later proved to be a great winning field for AAP when it won its only four Lok Sabha seats in 2014 general elections from the State of Punjab.

AAP volunteers even started a Facebook page (https://www.Facebook.com/AAPtivist) (A Volunteer-driven initiative) for sharing their personal stories of hope and change they wish for the future of the country. A widow from Hyderabad having been tortured by her in-laws post her husband’s death writes that AAP has given her a ray of hope. She writes candidly “whenever I get time, I keep listening to Arvind's speeches. But still now, I have to roam the streets of police station, court and government offices for pensions. So, in future, I don't want any woman to face such situations like me. For this reason I want AAP to come in power. Now, I am a strong supporter of AAP and I promise to help AAP to clean my motherland from all dirts and corruption. I fully believe that one day, AAP will surely be successful to regain humanity in India”

Arvind’s speech after taking oath on 28th December 2013 saw the maximum “likes” as he declared “[w]e should not get arrogant. Don't get arrogant ever. Work for the people with service as the goal. We have not come here to become ministers. We were born to remove the arrogance of big parties. We should be wary that no other party has to take birth to dismantle us”.

AAP also shares Facebook updates of many of its members and party leaders whereas Kejriwal used his own page to connect to his volunteers and especially in role of the captain of the ship. Political parties have dedicated teams for handling their social media campaign and these teams like any other professional corporate team create and ‘work on adapting essentially the same message for various media and
formats’ (Philipose, 2015). Well most of Arvind’s tweets were put on AAP Facebook page during the election campaign. Even after the election were over, the Facebook page and Twitter are normally used to broadcast their opinions about their internal party issued and also on various national and international issues.

The Facebook page is so designed, that it comes across as a site of constant conversation with the users. There would be greetings on various festivals or on the anniversaries of important personalities, along with a message accompanying the occasion. The aim is to stir the mind of the readers and the point is to bring about the true picture of politics of today and contrast it with the ideals that the founding father of the nation stood for.

AAP also made extensive use of Twitter during elections, in form of Kejriwal’s own tweets which reached over 3 million followers and through those of other AAP leaders, volunteers and followers. AAP’s success among other factors was also attributed to its successful and well-planned social media campaign. AAP created a research tool (in fact it was the three IITians who helped form the software) before the elections to trawl thousands of social media posts to access public opinion which helped it to shape its agenda for its electoral manifesto. As AAP proclaims that they didn’t have money for print or electronic media, social media was their only way. For AAP, around 100 million Facebook users and 33 million Twitter users were considered to be an important vote bank. Kejriwal took social media by storm, not just with Twitter wars with the BJP, but used the social media app Mango, which became an aam aadmi ka radio, Quora, a Q&A site, online platform Frankly Speaking, Facebook, WhatsApp. Even on the day of polling Arvind tweeted an interview with a satire website which made fun of his style.

AAP uses all forms of medium like uploading videos, their written notes or sharing other people associated with the AAP, or putting news clips for creating their own content drawings or coverage in the other electronic media. It synchronises the same with tweets of A. Kejriwal or the others to keep its followers well informed. Every news share is followed by several comments and to ensure activity alignment among its various social media platforms the twitters of various party leaders were posted on the Facebook timeline. Well alignment among messages across various forms of social media is an important strategy. It is crucial to ensure that Social Media activities are all aligned with each other. Many business and commercial groups use combination of
social networking sites, blogs or upload their content on YouTube etc. goal of any
communication is the resolution of ambiguity and reduction of uncertainty and nothing
is more confusing than contradicting messages across different channels (Kaplan et al.,
2010).

During the Delhi election the AAP party page was focussing on the Delhi election but
after its aftermath Arvind’s own page deals with Delhi and its issues whereas the AAP
page deals with all the national and other state issue. Of course it is clearly dominated
by the opinions and stances of Arvind Kejriwal’s page. But there is an effort on the part
of AAP that it should not become synonymous to Arvind Kejriwal, which many of its
sceptics believe that it has become. AAP now focuses on the forthcoming election in
Punjab. It has caught the imagination of people of Punjab in a big way and its stunning
victory in terms of getting four and only seats into the Lok Sabha from Punjab bears
testimony to this. One of the contributing factors to the victory of AAP was the support
of the Punjabi diaspora (Judge, 2015a). AAP has been constantly keeping itself
immersed in the issues of Punjab and the time will tell whether it will repeat its success
in Punjab as in Delhi.

Although BJP and Congress have larger presence on the social media if we go by
number of individuals ‘liking’ the official Facebook page of the above parties. This
should also be considered within the context that AAP is a nascent party, whereas other
two parties are veterans in all sense of the term and they have pan India presence .AAP
in its small stint of just four years have a remarkable social presence. Also, if we look
into the content on Facebook pages of both the Congress and BJP, we would find that,
though they have adopted this media they seem to be distant from their supporters.
They only broadcast their activities. Obviously the BJP is on the side of declaring their
achievements and Congress trying to belittle them(also AAP) but the mode of
communication is one-directional or at times(near elections) too submissive. The
language of BJP is of arrogance or of Narendra Modi is to project an over the top image
of himself. Whereas on the other hand, being a party which was being cradled by the
social media, for AAP, social media streams are an important way to reach out to its
supporters, volunteers and voters. This has a profound influence on the way they handle
their social media presence. The content on AAP’s Facebook page is generally more
interactive in nature and they addresses themselves directly to its readers. The content is
brainstorming as well as heart-warming.
If we look into the people/social movements in their inception we find them to be too idealistic, closer to the people and holding the conscience of people. Congress has the legacy of a people’s movement, may be that is the cause of its firm rooting in the Indian mind. BJP never had that rooting accept for the ideological(Hindtuva) base and the grass root level working of RSS but AAP has come out of a social movement and this might hold it to have a bright future. The middle classes, the outcome the British Raj in India, were considered to be the forerunners of Indian nationalist movement (Desai, 1948). The middle classes of independent India have now recognised the faults within their own structure. This educated middle class of India is at the receiving end of the corrupt bureaucratic structure and the capitalistic global policies, which are both emancipating and destructive. Kejriwal represents this class of people and has unleashed the hopes and fears of this India.

So, India is emerging as an important destination on the digital map of the world. Precisely for the very same reason the social media giants are eyeing on Indian users for their future growth. This is of course in economic sense is an unleashed domain. Facebook is collaborating with other partners for its Internet.org project whose aim is to “bring Internet access and the benefits of connectivity to the two-thirds of the world that doesn’t have them” (https://info.Internet.org). It named it as Free Basics by Facebook, which is going to provide people with access to basic websites for free – like news, job postings, health and education information, and communication tools like Facebook.

Social media terrain in India represents as much variance and diversity for which Indian society is known for. The virtual is not aloof from the real. Individuals carry their identities, awfulness, hopes and fears onto these platforms. Social media empowers commoners, break boundaries, crumble hierarchies and unsettle notions. As more and more individuals are going to embrace this domain which stands for massive communication, free speech and cult of individual autonomy this is surely going to result in social churning.