

Engaging the Crowd: Social Movement Building via Online Bystander Mobilization

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become increasingly important as a space for both organized and ad-hoc activism. As social movement organizations have shifted many aspects of their communication online, bystander populations - citizens who may be somewhat interested in a movement but are largely uninvolved in its activities - have begun to play a more significant role in the achievement of movement aims. In this paper, we examine bystander targeting on social media by social movement organizations in India. Through interviews, observation, and participation, we investigate ways that activists themselves conceptualize, carry out, and reflect upon their own messaging strategies in online spaces, and the perceived success and failure of these strategies. We discuss the limitations of social media as a space in which to achieve movement aims, particularly in a class-segregated context. Our work illustrates the tension faced by activists between prioritizing short and long-term movement goals in the digital sphere.

CCS CONCEPTS

- Human-centered computing—Empirical studies in HCI

KEYWORDS

Social media; social movements; bystander audiences; digital activism; bystander frame alignment

1 INTRODUCTION

As social media has come to be widely used by diverse populations in a variety of regions, online spaces and new media technologies have had an increasing role in shaping both personal political affiliations and the larger socio-political context. This expansion of digital activism is a fundamentally sociotechnical phenomenon, since it deals with who is online, what causes drive them, what online tools they use, how they engage with and conceptualize these tools, and finally what, in turn, this implies for the future of activism and development in society. Recent work has explored several aspects of online organizing and outreach. This includes

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ICTD '20, June 17–20, 2020, Guayaquil, Ecuador
© 2020 Association for Computing Machinery.
ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-8762-0/20/06 \$15.00
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3392561.3394633>

work on the role of online storytelling in movements [23,54], on social media as a space for collectivizing discourses [19], and on social media as a tool for mediating movement undercurrents [44], as well as a significant body of work on the organization of protest via social media [83]. There have been active debates, both in the academy and in the public sphere, over the value and limits of online, social-media based activism [48,63], particularly in the Global South. At the same time, there has both been recognition of the practical value of online proselytization, and efforts to build new digital tools specifically aimed at community-driven social change [47].

However, we are still at early stages of understanding the different ways that social media enables social movements to frame their arguments, goals, and motivations to bystander audiences. Bystanders are the ‘not directly involved, but nevertheless attentive audience’ that movements must resonate with in order to accrue cultural power, delegitimize opponents, and successfully create change [30,72–74]. They form a liminal layer in the outreach sphere of a cause, and are a primary target audience for movement conversion. Bystanders are especially understudied in developing countries with class-segregated social media demographics, where work has focused largely on the organization of large-scale protest [4,12,84]. In much of the Global South, certain online spaces are largely the purview of an urban, middle class population, and have become widely accessible only in the last few years. This has important consequences for the organization and operationalization of social and political collectives online.

In this paper, we examine Indian social movement organizations’ (SMOs) use of social media as a space to reach out to movement bystanders. We employ a qualitative approach, furthering the project set out by Wulf (2013) in using ‘orthodox qualitative studies... [to] supplement ‘e-research’ into political activism’ [83]. Through in-depth interviews and observation at nine social movement organizations in India, and an analysis of the framing strategies, processes, and techniques employed by movement activists online and offline, we hope to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: How do SMO activists align frames with bystander audiences to achieve movement goals?

RQ2: In what ways are SMO activists successful in achieving these goals?

In answering these research questions, we contribute a new conceptualization of social movement bystander audiences in the

social media space. We expand upon the bystander concept as previously applied to social movements generally, and to digitally-mediated activism in particular. We define and operationalize the concept of bystander frame alignment, which acts as a foundation upon which to study bystander-centered movement messaging on social media.

Using this foundation, we complicate ICTD's understanding of digital activism by situating our study in the Indian political, social, and class context, with its own particular set of online bystander, adherent, and antagonist audiences. We shed light on the affordances and limitations of online bystander targeting in this context, particularly the tension between prioritizing short-term movement sustainability and long-term changemaking, and the increasingly hegemonic, middle-class controlled political discourse that defines the online political sphere.

Finally, we contribute a new dimension to the current understanding of online activism through examining the daily practices, self-reflections, and perceptions of movement activists as they conceptualize and carry out their work on social media platforms.

2 BACKGROUND

Tarrow [76] and Klandermans [43] define social movements as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites and authorities". Such movements have shaped our world - through uprisings and revolutions, but also through long decades of sustained organizing, lobbying, and advocacy, creating incremental and necessary change within communities [53].

These movements are often driven by social movement organizations (SMOs), which create methods of structured collaboration, outline mechanics for struggle and success, and frame movement goals, motivations, and outcomes [21,85]. Movement activists and their practices are central to the functioning and evolution of the movements themselves, and studying these practices gives us insight into how these organizations conceptualize and work towards movement aims, and how new communication technology influences this process. In this section, we briefly review framing literature, introduce and define bystander frame alignment, and examine the interaction between Indian social movements, bystanders, and the Indian class context.

2.1 Bystander Frame Alignment

The concept of frames refers to action-oriented sets of beliefs that serve to propagate movement ideologies and foster participation. While frames as a concept have been present in communication theory since the 1950s [65], the idea was introduced to social movement literature in the late 1980s, when scholars realized that the communication of constructed meaning was central and necessary to the achievement of movement aims [71]. Engaging in framing enables SMOs to negotiate an understanding and characterization of a specific problematic condition, outline

possible solutions for that condition, and advocate for actions and mobilizations to create change [8]. Often, SMOs develop and deploy different types of frames for different target audiences, in order to strategically align their interpretive frames with a particular audience's pre-existing contexts, motivations, and cultures. This is referred to as 'frame alignment' [72].

In addition to mobilizing movement constituents and demobilizing antagonists, one of the major tasks of a social movement organization is to garner bystander support [34,70,73,74,82]. Gamson defined bystanders as those who, "though not currently engaged or part of the primary target constituency, can become potential allies if they adopt preferred movement frames" [30]. Social movements may construct certain frames specifically to garner bystander support, often needing to use alignment techniques and tactics different from those used for other target audiences [3,11,37,51]. Often, frames that are useful and effective in mobilizing adherents or recruiting certain populations may be actively detrimental in reaching bystander audiences, each of which have specific interests, goals, and preferences that must be taken into account in the framing process. For example, PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals), an animal rights movement organization, has long put out extreme and graphic content around animal suffering, and claimed that even keeping a pet is inhumane and causes great distress to all animals. These appeals target already-involved movement activists and adherents, and can mobilize these groups to rallies and protests, but often serve to actively antagonize bystander audiences, even those potentially amenable to their broader movement aims [62].

Social movement scholars have generally considered bystanders either as potential recruits, as the base of potential or threatened mobilization in case of an on-ground political struggle, or as the site of individual behavior change that may be a part of movement success for many social movement organizations [22,38,74]. In framing analyses, bystanders are often painted as a monolithic and fairly apathetic group, rather than as a set of segregated audiences with deeply held beliefs, anxieties, and worldviews of their own [8,30,34,70,74]. In this paper, we address these issues by conceptualizing the process of *bystander frame alignment*, the strategic alignment of an SMO's interpretive frame with the perceived frame of a specific bystander audience. We operationalize the study of this process through interrogating the practices of activists as they construct, interact with, and optimize asks for particular bystander audiences on social media.

Social media is an urgent site for a close examination of bystander framing processes for social movements in the current context. The advent of social media as a space for socio-political discussion, messaging, and organizing may lead to a shift in the role of bystander audiences in the social movement space. Social movements now have unprecedented access to bystander audiences, and an ability to target messaging on demographic, socioeconomic, and regional lines, optimizing frames for particular bystander audiences to achieve specific goals. Further, social media has been discussed as a space that fosters light-touch, low-risk connective action, a type of low-barrier movement action

particularly appealing to bystander audiences [9, 69]. This type of communication has two main elements. The first is political content in the form of easily personalized, inclusive ideas, such as the expansive easily identified-with ‘We are the 99%’ frame of the anti-income inequality Occupy Wall Street movement. The second is communication technologies that enable individuals unaffiliated with movements to share these themes and ideas [9,10]. This enables social media to act as a sphere of personal action frames, in which calls to action do not necessarily require ‘joining with established groups or ideologies’ but potentially participating through other, easier means. On social media platforms, individuals can identify with and support a social movement in light-touch, low-risk ways, without acquiescing to the greater demands, actions, and sacrifices that traditional collective action may require. There is an element, too, of bypassing traditional gatekeepers, as explored by Subramanian in analyzing feminist activism on social media and diagramming the networks of solidarity that can be created with previously unaffiliated target audiences [75]. Social media also offers an avenue for performativity, through which individuals can be seen as supporting certain desirable causes that they may want to be outwardly associated with [6,9,10,25]. Thus, social media emerges as an ideal site for movements to reach, recruit, and engage with bystanders.

We are aware that there are several other important target audiences for movement frames - including the media, antagonists, committed supporters, the government, etc. [42] - and that there are other framing disciplines, especially in media and communication studies at large. However, we find bystander outreach, in the context of social movement framing, to be a particularly rich field of study in the present social media context. This is especially true as social media platforms themselves have become a class- and identity- segregated space, as in much of the Global South.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In this study, we examine bystander frame alignment through the conceptual framework outlined by Snow (1986) to delineate the types of frame alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation [72].

Frame bridging is achieved through linking unconnected audience frames by emphasizing already existing similarities between groups or issues [8]. For example, the anti-corruption movement in India in 2011 brought together highly unlikely allies, with often-contradictory goals and frames, combining grassroots activists, business leaders, right-wing politicians, and religious figures. These groups united briefly, linked through the frame of publicly denouncing corruption in the ruling Congress party [18,69].

Frame amplification involves the highlighting and consistent reinforcing of a specific value, issue, or belief contained within a movement, in order to reach an audience already amenable to that particular chosen frame. For example, for certain audiences Hindu supremacists in India have used this tactic to combat accusations of stoking violence and bigotry, by amplifying values such as ‘heritage preservation’ and ‘pride’ [1].

Frame extension is the process through which an SMO broadens its framing to include a target audience’s perceived interests, motivations, or points of view. For instance, activists for women’s safety in Delhi have extended feminist, rights- and justice-oriented frames for new audiences, bringing in rhetoric around pride in the city of Delhi, and the shame residents should feel that, while the city had new and shiny infrastructure, its treatment of women remained archaic. [40].

Frame transformation is used when there is little or no alignment between the target audience and the SMO, and deep-seated reframing or rigorous education is needed. In this case, new values and meanings may have to be constructed and encouraged in the target audience, and erroneous beliefs or “misframings” reframed [33]. While frame transformation is less well-documented, there have been instances of documented success. For example, a Black feminist collective used frame transformation to combat racist and sexist understandings of rape within their target community, redefining rape-supportive definitions and discourses through feminist constructions of sexual assault and justice [81].

While bystander frame alignment processes have not been studied in depth on social media, especially in the Indian context, previous HCI research has more generally explored the four types of frame alignment and their translation to the digital sphere. Dimond et. al. examined the power of collective storytelling as a strategy for frame extension and transformation amongst women subjected to street harassment [23]. They found that engaging in collective narrative-building shifted reactions to harassment, provided space to heal and reflect, and encouraged survivors to actively combat the issue in the future. Michie et. al. extended this work, exploring the ways in which digital storytelling could act as an advocacy and framing tool [54]. Kow et. al. investigated the ways in which organizers amplify certain collective frames to sympathetic audiences, while hiding the undercurrents and invisible work that result in these frames [44]. Hon studied the social media framing strategies used by the Million Hoodies movement against police brutality in the US. The alignment tactic most commonly seen was that of frame amplification, encouraging supporters to act on their pre-existing values of justice and equality for African-Americans, although examples of frame bridging, in linking Trayvon Martin’s circumstances to those of other African American men, were also observed [36]. Frame amplification is also seen in the social media and web presence of the 15M movement in Spain. This movement focused messaging around naming institutional evils, and contrasting these institutions to the righteousness and solidarity values of the ‘common people’ [77].

2.3 Middle Class Bystander Audiences in India

We now consider the specific bystander audiences studied in this paper, and outline previous work conceptualizing, defining, and characterizing the Indian middle class.

Since the economic liberalization of the 1990s, globalized capitalism has produced a large and growing middle class in India [28]. There is no clear consensus defining the Indian middle class - as of 2010, estimates of size ranged from 5% to 13% of the

population [7,39]. However, existing scholarship has specified certain habits, identities, and cultural and social practices that describe this 'new middle class'. They are generally urban and educated, and defined by cultures of consumption, political nationalism, aspiration, and professionalism [13,26,27,52]. Scholars such as Fernandes and Shah [28,67] have suggested that this consumerist, capitalist culture has made the majority new middle class largely anti-poor, and indifferent to marginalized social groups. The new middle class has also been characterized as prioritizing civic order over most other political goals, and thus is generally pro-privatization, and against the 'corrupt' political class and inflammatory political rhetoric [29,35,60,69]. In recent years, mainstream political discourse has moved towards considering this upwardly mobile middle class as the 'representative citizens of liberalizing India' [28], and the necessary foundation of a modernizing nation. This can be seen in a recent upsurge in capitalist cum nationalist political slogans such as 'Made in India', 'India Shining' and 'there is no better time to be an Indian', which capture the economic aspirations and national pride of the new middle class [13,41]. This has made middle class support increasingly necessary for the successful achievement of political and social goals.

The middle class has played a variety of roles in India's long history of social movement organizing in the post-colonial period [58]. Shah [66] provides a taxonomy of Indian social movements, classifying movements into nine types: peasant movements, tribal movements, Dalit movements, backward caste movements, women's movements, industrial working class movements, students' movements, middle class movements, and environmental movements, acknowledging the overlap between many of these categories. Shah and others have found that many leaders of movements across categories do come from the urban, educated middle class. However, this group of movement leaders and activists is small, concentrated, and not the norm, with the majority of the middle class traditionally remaining uninvolved in social movement organizing [26,66].

One major exception to this is in the case of middle class movements, many of which are based around touchpoints traditionally appealing to the Indian middle class, based on the characterizations outlined above. These generally include movements around nationalism and national pride, moral and cultural issues, environmentalism, cleanliness and urban space, anti-corruption, and preservation of certain civil or democratic rights [2,28,35,66,69]. These middle class movements can work in tandem with other movements. For example, middle class movements for environmental consciousness often also work to conserve and protect tribally owned land [24]. However, middle class movement activists do frequently come into contention with other movement or class groups. This is common when dealing with issues of urban areas, a zone in which successful middle class movements often result in the removal of other groups, seen as 'unruly' or 'unclean', from public spaces [2,31,32]. Even in the environmental case, movements such as the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, an anti-dam construction movement, have been criticized

for prioritizing the "identity of middle class radicalism" rather than the needs and desires of the local people [24].

2.4 Social Media Audiences in India

In addition to a growing class divide, India has seen dramatic changes, particularly in the last decade, with access to telecommunications. Currently, the major social media platforms have large and growing user bases in India, and social media has been discussed in the Indian popular press as being central to recent political and social development [16]. At the time of writing, estimates state that Twitter's monthly active users are at 30-33 million, Facebook's are at 270 million, and WhatsApp are at more than 400 million [50,86]. Due to these developments, many political parties, politicians, and other socio-political actors have taken to social media as a primary outlet of public outreach and discussion [49]. In some cases, social media has become the space in which political agendas are crafted, disseminated, and updated [59]. Systematic studies have also shown that social media has important second order effects, in that mainstream media follows and relays what happens on social media [16]. It is important to note that only 29% of users from India are women, and online safety presents barriers for women in participating fully on these platforms, particularly in the space of activism and political involvement [64,75]. Social media adoption has occurred, to an extent, across class divides, particularly amongst men in urban areas for leisure purposes, as noted by Kumar in 2014 [45]. However, the producers of information on social media, as well as those who actively engage with and set trends for social media content, particularly political content, generally continue to be from the middle and upper-middle classes [5]. As is the case offline, this has led to an appropriation of active political and social discourses by the increasingly politically hegemonic middle-classes on social media [17,46,61,68].

2 METHODOLOGY

We situate this paper in the context of a larger ethnographic project mapping the practices and processes of activism through qualitative methods [83]. To this end, the primary researcher conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with social movement organization activists in the cities of Delhi, Bangalore, and Chennai, India, as well as a total of 40 hours of observation and participation. For context, the primary researcher is located in Bangalore, India, as is the research team. As is typical in ethnographic research, we started with a broad scope to investigate the area of activism in India, and then narrowed down our area of interest to social movement organizations, after the first two interviews with P2 and P4.

Two broad kinds of social movement organizations were targeted: those that focused on cultural impact, such as awareness-building, education, and attitude change, and those that focused on more specific, political impact - such as targeting particular policies, influencing government or political actions, or issue-based electoral gain. There is significant overlap between these two mandates, and the more political organizations often used cultural

tools to achieve their aims; however, this general dichotomy was useful in targeting and analyzing movement practices.

Four cultural-impact movement advocacy organizations were studied. For each, we examined their online campaigns, and interviewed the head of the organization, as well as media and social media strategists, writers, and organizers. Each of these organizations was made up of between ten and forty full-time workers, aided by a larger group of volunteers. The first organization, henceforth C1, campaigned against sexual violence and repressive sexual norms in India, with a digital platform that has garnered millions of pageviews. The second, C2, mobilized largely digitally for intersectional feminist causes of caste and class justice. The third, C3, ran online and offline campaigns for various social justice issues, particularly around recent workers' and farmers' movements in India. The fourth, C4, is focused on changing perceptions and fostering a sense of urgency and action around air pollution and climate issues.

In addition, five political-impact organizations were included. One organization, henceforth referred to as P1, supported a thousands-strong, country-wide, loosely organized movement for Dalit rights, and the leader of this organization was interviewed. For context, Dalit is a term of self-identification meaning “crushed” or “broken”, and refers to those at the very bottom of India's caste hierarchy. Despite constitutional prohibition of the caste system, Dalits continue to suffer caste-based discrimination and violence [80]. A second organization, P2, formed a national mass movement against corruption in the Indian government and bureaucracy, with a mobilization of millions. We spoke to the social media team and the operational team for this movement, and attended meetings and movement events. The third, P3, is a 29-year-old organization that is an alliance of progressive peoples' movements in India. This organization, rooted in environmental and civil rights activism, is a national umbrella group for rights-based movements across India. The organization itself consists of about a hundred full-time organizers and activists, working directly and indirectly with hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries. Rallies and organizing meetings were attended, and leaders, on-ground activists, and rally participants were interviewed. The fourth, P4, is a smaller, grassroots organization in Chennai, that focuses primarily on water rights and bureaucratic corruption. The activities of these groups include street rallies, boycotts, and anti-government protests. The primary researcher observed these activities through accompaniment at rallies, observations at the office premises, and interviews with members and volunteers. The fifth, P5, was a loose movement organization supporting farmer's marches, rallies, and protests for farmer and Adivasi (tribal) rights. The media liaisons for this movement were interviewed.

Movement organizations were contacted through convenience sampling. Organizations were chosen according to their compatibility with the definition of social movement organizations described above, and according to language and travel constraints (the primary researcher is fluent in English and Tamil, and lives in Bangalore). Organizations were contacted either directly by the primary researcher, or through an aggregator of digital activist

organizations. Names of organizations are omitted from the paper, as interviewees requested to remain anonymous, and many were concerned about being identified either personally or through their organization. Of the total of 26 interviews conducted, 6 were long distance interviews via telephone or Skype. Interviews ranged in time between thirty minutes to three hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and translated (to English, when in Tamil) for analysis. The primary researcher read the transcripts several times and assigned descriptive codes in the manner described by Miles et. al. [55], which were discussed amongst the research team. Themes began to emerge around movement framing, audience targeting, and the need or desire for bystander support in achieving movement aims. Research questions for subsequent interviews were expanded to encompass these themes.

3 FINDINGS

Our participants targeted bystanders on social media in service of two general types of movement goals: short-term organization visibility and sustainability, and long-term behavior or values change in bystander audiences. They used distinct framing tactics and strategies to achieve these aims, and were careful in optimizing each frame deployed on social media for either short or long term goals.

3.1 Short-term Movement Sustainability

Participants used bystander frame alignment practices to fulfill clear, short term movement needs. These generally fell into two categories - attention-getting and fundraising - both of which were seen as crucial for movement sustainability and self-reproduction. Several participants expressed a need to be consistently visible, to be seen as relevant and important, and to be significantly present in the larger conversation around their movement issue.

One movement leader, campaigning for Dalit rights and justice for backward caste populations, spoke about the affective value of social media and media coverage, and the potential for media missives to go “viral” without the need for traditional high cost campaigns. He points out that as a young, grassroots leader currently unaffiliated with a national party or institution with access to funding, he needs the impression of populist support and general importance to continue being relevant in the national sphere.

“I'm not actively doing much on social media...But it is only because, I know my content already does reach the people. Because when I speak it goes on YouTube,...people keep making it viral, these interviews, Facebook posts, which are copied and sent to the WhatsApp groups. Why? I have the sense, of how to get a headline, if I want people to see it. Like - Dhanteras...it is this puja [religious event] for wealth. That day, I said, today is Dhanteras. So you keep this teras, give Dalits back our Dhan (wealth). This one line...I know, it will go viral. That is why I said it. And it did, headlines, then Twitter, Facebook, everything.” — P1, Leader

This leader *extends* his framing to target both social media bystanders and the media, understanding the interplay between

these groups and fashioning what he sees as media-worthy moments in service of his visibility goals. He uses wordplay to give the message standalone value on wit even to those who may not be immediately aligned, such as those sharing a Dalit identity or those already on board with the movement and cause. He understands that he is reaching out to multiple audiences - his target electorate on the ground, who are often poorer, rural populations and may not have the social or economic capital to push his movement's agenda forward, the bystander social media audience, who are crucial to visibility and continued media interest, and the media itself. He *extends* his platform of anti-caste discrimination to include the kinds of constructed, performative activist narratives that he knows the media will cover. Further, in focusing on creating viral moments that are easily shareable on middle-class, urban dominated social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, he also gives his audience the ability to perform allyship with his movement and with his target electorate.

However, a key to his success, and also one of his greatest anxieties, is the momentum that drives his virality. As he admits, he does not have the time or budget to run a well-oiled organizational machine and therefore must rely on the fact that he is newsworthy, and that a selfie-sharing, digitally active youth audience aggressively retweets him.

"I don't know what will happen when the youth is not taking selfies with me...sharing selfies. And that will happen, it may happen [in] 3 years, 4 years. And then I don't know, I'll have to find another way. Social media mobilization, that media mobilization, it is crucial for me. Absolutely crucial. I need it to be able to reach the people, the youth." — P1, Leader

The quote highlights the temporality of social media success, and the perceived fickleness of social media audiences. This leader is able to use his hard-won public image to *extend* frames around class and caste discrimination to a potentially apathetic youth demographic that may be personally unaffected by the movement. However, his fears of losing this demographic in the next few years speaks to his awareness of the fairly shallow engagement and pull that he has with this group. This stands in contrast to long-term work with traditional non-bystander stakeholders, who are organized village-by-village over time, and whose fundamental identity and life experiences are tied to the cause.

Herein lies a fundamental conundrum for activists. Without this perceived relevance among the middle-class bystanders, the activists we spoke to did not feel well-placed enough in the socio-political sphere to achieve their movement aims. Participants from the political organizations mentioned their impression that *'the media has stopped covering people's movements, so these politicians don't listen'*, which makes *'visible support, with people from a voice already, like on social media'* (P3) more important. Thus the middle classes making a cause newsworthy, a phenomenon enabled by the demographics of social media platforms, becomes central to performing and experiencing legitimacy for social movement activists.

Relatedly, the other major short-term ask was for funding. Simply put, these movement organizations need funds to perpetuate themselves and continue their work. Fundraising was also central to some movement organizations' mandates - C3's campaigns were often funding-focused, and it was their primary axis of impact. Fundraising asks were highly targeted, and activists from C2, C3, P3, and P5 all spoke about constructing asks to play upon the perceived wants, fears, goals, and preferences of the bystander audience. This becomes clear in the pitching of any ideas or organizations that may be seen as Left-leaning, which middle-class, bystander audiences in India are traditionally wary of.

"AIKS [a farmers organization in India] is a left organization. So then - 'They're Maoist, Naxalites [a violent leftist group]' that also starts. So to counter that - we have personal stories. This is graphic, their legs are swollen, they are bleeding, they are falling walking. They are in pain. No one can counter that - these are tribals, poor farmers, they are walking because they have to. Jai kisan and that as well. We are India, we support our farmers. That will work on social media because people also want to be seen supporting the farmers in this country." — C3, Campaign lead

This campaigner appeals to the newly nationalistic sentiments of the middle class, calling back to 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' (Glory to our soldiers, glory to our farmers), a 1965 prime ministerial slogan that defined India's priorities as its soldiers and farmers. The slogan draws on Gandhian ideas of prioritizing and romanticizing the rural, farming belt of India as part of patriotic values, counteracting perceptions of demanding and disruptive peasants. While a radical leftist movement may be seen as insurgent and threatening to the economic order, coupling it with this slogan *extends* the farmer's movement to include an appealing nationalistic framing, and also plays upon the bystander desire to be seen supporting these patriotic causes. The campaigner must also anticipate and tackle counter-frames, which try and *bridge* this movement with violent splinter groups. These frames are in turn countered with graphic descriptions of the farmers' physical pain and suffering, *amplifying* common bystander values against human suffering and pain.

Campaigners concurred across interviews that educating the social media audience on systemic oppression or long-term movement aims would not succeed as a fundraising mechanism. Instead, traditional techniques of storytelling, featuring a character, narrative, and strong emotional pull, were reliable. For example, a campaigner who attempted to fundraise around a long-standing land rights dispute for peasants in rural India expressed the difficulty of reaching out with a more complicated issue: *'See, urban India doesn't understand all this...the basic understanding is not there, so you always need a really good story'* (C3).

Another activist was very candid about the kinds of issues and stories that seem to automatically resonate with social media audiences, and that are therefore easy to fundraise for.

Sometimes, you don't need to do much. In this case, there's a rape incidence, that's one layer. There's a minor, that's another. She was kept in a shed for a week - another. That in itself is gruesome, enough to get emotional. Beyond that, if a mainstream political

party holds a rally in support of the rapist, then people lose it. They want to do something. So we made a narrative around this, not a graphic video, just this information...did you know, this happened, this is happening, do you accept that? Are you part of this? Do you support this? It was mainly on Facebook and Twitter...we raised 40 lakh (4 million) in three days. - C3, Campaign lead

Here, the activist *amplifies* the existing deeply emotional facts and narrative of the case to target already concerned bystander audiences. They list the reasons why this will appeal to the Facebook and Twitter audience - gruesome crime, child victim, involvement of a mainstream political party - and point out that with these attributes, there is less need to 'do much' to reach these audiences. They amplify these aspects with a viral video, and add a call to action that is shaped as a normative question - 'do you accept this?' There is no plan for follow-up or further education, simply an appealingly crafted ask, amplifying existing values and triggers, that is quick and easy for the target audience to fulfill, feel positive about the interaction, and move on.

However, there were situations in which short-term social media fundraising and visibility asks did lead to the achievement of movement aims, by putting pressure on powerful political actors. One activist spoke to us about how a thousands-strong march of farmers and tribal people on the nation's financial capital, Mumbai, rescheduled their closing rally, with the stated reason that they wanted to respect of student examinations. Despite the successful mass mobilization and physical hardship endured by these farmers, the organizers of the march had fears that they would not be heard by politicians in Mumbai without the support of the urban population. Thus, this narrative was specifically engineered to make the '*Bombay people go crazy*' via a social media sensation that would hopefully endear them to the urban, middle class population.

This gesture was a massive success - *extending* the movement frames to include middle class values of education, civic order, respect for urban space, and even playing into the discomfort and disdain often felt by middle-class bystanders around loud protests and rallies. 'Farmer's march has won social media!' cried the news the next morning [87]. The activist attributed some of their success in meeting with government officials, and securing commitments to address the rural crisis, to this viral social media sensation.

And yet, the apparent success driven by the media attention highlights how campaigns can quickly turn into pseudoevents from the past. The bystanders lacked skin in the game and had limited participation in the street events, even though they drove media coverage. Three months later, the commitments made at the height of the media frenzy over the farmer agitation had not been met, and urban groups could no longer be relied upon to participate in another round of agitation - even as the farmers themselves planned a third march to Mumbai. This highlights the mismatch between prioritizing visibility and achieving long-term goals.

3.2 Long-term Movement Changemaking

Movement activists also used social media to try and effect long-term change in bystander audiences, specifically targeting changes in either held values or in performed behavior. Often, this involved translating the process of frame transformation into the social media space. Organizations experienced varied levels of success in achieving these long-term goals. Several activists, particularly from political organizations, called out tensions between the affordances of social media and their goals of long-term civic education, political progress, and systemic change. During a rally for marginalized groups around the country to set a 2019 election agenda, attended almost entirely by people who were mobilized through traditional outreach, one of the event conveners spoke to this tension.

So I think social media has an important role...but I would say that the marginalized sections of the population are rural, Dalit, tribal - they are out of reach of the technology, the media, the social media. Then you have to do this kind of mobilization that you see in Jantar Mantar today, where people have physically come from thousands of kilometers. And this is the only way they can assert their voice, they can't just sit and send messages on Twitter or Facebook, they are vocal about their rights, they have a strong grassroots presence, our groups have done long-term education, organization building. - P3, National level organizer

P3, through its decades of work, has consistently followed the deep-touch, collective action-based model of activism. Framing work has centered around frame transformation - building new meanings and reconstructing struggle within the context of a specific population for a long-term goal, and prioritizing the long and difficult process of building a small but deeply committed cadre in rural areas. In this quote, the national convener underlines the effort involved in transforming the frames of this citizen population, in which the language of rights and enfranchisement is often entirely missing; a population that is certainly unreachable online.

This activist sees social media audiences as helpful for mass support, but transient, uncommitted, and difficult to involve in this *frame transformation* process. He then says, somewhat ruefully, that "*We do need [social media], because it's the only way to do mass outreach...it's difficult for us to make it work, but what can you do?*" (P3), seemingly resigning himself to the importance of reaching out to bystander audiences because of their importance in the public and political discourse of the country. While his movement's aims are squarely around organizing the rural and tribal belts of India, he recognizes that there is a need to reach out to bystanders distinctly outside of and far from these groups, despite feeling that this will not lead to the long-term change the movement hopes for.

This feeling that the most successful, in-depth work must be done through long-term, on-ground programs was echoed by other activists. P4 has been lauded for their social media savvy, sending out viral videos about corruption in their city that have garnered hundreds of thousands of views. However, in discussing the impact of his work, the founder of the organization described the

difference between social media success and the kind of change that can come through their district-by-district rights-education workshops.

A lot of people who have come to Know Your Rights [workshops] have used the mechanisms, the RTI [Right to Information] act, and so on. With the social media, people talk about it a lot, but it's hard to know if you've made that impact. You saw that, for our event thousands of people have come... On our Facebook, we have these 200,000 likes, all that. But if you call volunteers for doing a survey, or a follow-up, evaluation, only 15-20 people will come. So how do you make these people participate in the democracy, participate in the movement? - P4, Founder

This activist is concerned about the armchair tendency of online activism, unconvinced that their organization's social media success is an indicator of the long-term redressal of the kinds of civil rights and anti-graft issues they target. They highlight the difference between the organization's social media engagement and the engagement seen at their physical, Know Your Rights workshops, through which they are able to *transform* the frames of participants around civil rights and justice. When the group attempts to bring their social media, bystander audience into the movement space to actively participate, they do not see at all comparable levels of engagement or participation, pointing to the unsuccessful nature of their frame transformation attempts online.

Activists also mentioned that ideas often have to be stripped of nuance to find purchase on social media platforms, which can make it difficult to engage in deep civic or political education. The leader of P1 speaks to the difficulty this presents in terms of growing a successful, established movement that can make significant national-level change, while relying on social media for visibility and reach.

In social media - they don't have a great consciousness. I am not saying this with intellectual arrogance, but it is like that. They want catchy lines and all, electrifying stuff...you know, when you can't mobilize, educate on large economic issues, your movement remains entangled...in this rhetoric. And how do you grow, change things, like that? - P1, Leader

Throughout our interview, this campaigner emphasized the need and pull he feels towards social media success, and how this success has become deeply intertwined with the sustainability of this movement. While he is confident in his current standing on these platforms, he seems uncomfortable with the long-term implications of this reliance on social media and media coverage for movement growth and changemaking potential.

Other activists, particularly from cultural change organizations, were more optimistic about the possibilities of changemaking via social media. Nevertheless, most participants felt that some aspects of frame transformation, or long-term, sustainable change, must necessarily come from offline conversations and community building. This was a common thread throughout the interviews, with activists from C2, C3, and C4, as well as P1, P2, and P4, all

mentioning that offline engagement is crucial for behavior change. As one content creator for C2 stated:

I don't know if that's something that we as a platform can just be like - hey, all you nonbelievers, people who are antagonized by feminism, come on board. I think the most effective way for that to happen is for people to start talking to their friends and families. That's why we put out a lot of content about how to be an ally, easy things to say, in private spaces. When you have these basic facts that you think, I'm definitely on board with that, I'm going to share it so that my conservative uncle can read and have a moment, I can post in my conservative family WhatsApp groups. We pick the story that's the most feminism 101-y, for WhatsApp. - C2, Content lead

C2 does most of its work online, with occasional offline educational events and workshops. Despite creating a digital platform for discussion of feminist issues explicitly to lead to values and behavior change, activists from this organization still feel that significantly impactful frame transformation can only take place offline. However, they are able to strategically use their online reach to influence this offline process, targeting their online content, via on-board bystander audiences, to potential offline audiences - 'conservative uncles', 'conservative family WhatsApp groups' - that would never personally visit their platform, or see their social media content. They *extend* their frames to cover these distant bystander audiences without having a specific path to reaching them. This long-term change strategy for frame transformation is a particularly interesting case of avoiding the perceived limitations of social media as a frame transformation space, by creating a pipeline, constructed through social media, to carry transformative frames to an otherwise unreachable bystander audience. Activists from C1, C2, and P2 also used similar techniques to strategically extend their online framing to various offline bystander audiences, particularly less-invested friends and family, with the goal of transforming frames for these audiences via their already convinced online bystanders.

4 DISCUSSION

Through our conceptualization of bystanders in the context of frame alignment, we extend work on movement recruitment, organizing, and consciousness-building on social media [23,44,54,63] to a Global South audience and set of actors, with its own power relations, preoccupations, and modes of interaction. We re-examine existing social media platforms as a space for movement activities in the Indian context, rather than focusing on the active design and development of tools to address the needs of movement activists. Our goal here is to present a nuanced understanding of what these needs are and where they come from, and to analyze the both the inherent and addressable limitations to fulfilling these needs.

4.1 Bystander Frame Alignment: Successes and Limitations

While it has been claimed that frame bridging and frame amplification are the most common alignment techniques in

traditional social movements and the easiest to realize [72], we found that frame extension was the technique most often used online by movement activists to target bystanders, particularly in the short term. Movements were often comprised of adherents and beneficiaries largely detached demographically or ideologically from the bystander audience. Thus, activists generally had to extend frames in some capacity to intersect with those of the bystander audience, in addition to amplifying or bridging with existing frames. Movement activists went to great lengths to fit their movement narratives, goals, and asks with middle-class bystander frames - tying their movements to distinctly middle class preoccupations [26–28] even when those preoccupations were at odds with certain goals of the movement. For example, the farmer’s march conveyed nationalistic tones and prioritized civic order to achieve social media success in the short-term, even though the deep distress of these farmers is in some ways directly tied to the Indian state, and activists agreed that only through a radical disruption of the civic paradigm could they achieve relief.

However, these strategies were far less effective in the long-term. In all the cases we studied, we did not observe a single instance of frame transformation being successfully deployed exclusively via a social media platform. This points to the limits of bystander frame alignment on social media, and also informs the types of movements that are successful online. Movements that were advocating for issues traditionally appealing to the middle class, particularly environmental or anti-corruption issues, found bystander framing simple, as existing movement frames already encompassed the outlook of a hypothetical bystander, with no transformation necessary. Likewise, activists advocating for cultural change, particularly in the feminist space, strategically found or created purchase with younger audiences, whose sensibilities tended towards concepts of social liberalism, and used that visibility as a springboard to reach other types of bystanders.

Fundamentally, this speaks to the fact that the bystander proselytization that social movement organizations could engage in was deeply tied to their existing agency, and the communities and groups they already had access to in some capacity. This echoes Toyama’s position on amplification [78], as we see that activists that did not already have some rhetorical, organizational, or personal access to certain communities could not bridge, extend, or amplify frames in order to reach these communities – they could only truly reach groups that were tangentially already connected to them. Many of the cultural organizations we worked with had closer ties to the middle classes – both due to the fact that the activists that worked in these organizations were often from educated, middle-class backgrounds themselves, and also due to the digital, office-based, narrative nature of their work. This brought natural overlaps in the ways of thinking about issues, the metaphors used in communicating about them which in turn could be leveraged to appeal to the sensibilities of middle-class bystanders online.

Meanwhile, grassroots activists from deeply political, working-class rooted movements, without any existing inroads into these communities, were more affected by the difficulty of truly

achieving frame transformation and reaching bystander audiences online. Despite strategic and useful short-term successes driven by viral messages, in the long term, radical activists were no longer able to access middle class-approved frames through frame extension tactics. These ‘approved’ frames were, essentially, too distant from the activists’ starting point to allow for any extension that could reasonably lead to intersection, and eventually conversion. This was a huge point of concern for these activists, particularly due to the larger issue of what is deemed newsworthy for the mainstream media to cover. Activists felt that it has become increasingly difficult to ‘make the news’ without the corollary social media attention, making social media a necessary segue into both the middle classes and thus into mainstream political discourse, increasingly hegemonically set by the middle class. While no social media sensation lasts forever, it became clear that bursts of short-term, short-lived virality often indicated movement sustainability. Thus, without long-term success on social media, movements were often unable to access new audiences or bridge fundamental gap in values or worldviews between adherents and bystanders, and a large portion of potential and necessary bystander support remained inaccessible. This further marginalized these already marginalized movement organizations, and the communities on whose behalf they were working.

The disconnect that we have outlined also creates a phenomenon in which certain (often more privileged) subgroups of a target demographic for cultural change have disproportionate agency and control over the goals, language, and preoccupations of a cultural movement. An analogue for this is recent critiques around ‘white feminism’ in the United States, in which middle-class white women have more control over (and receive more benefit from) mainstream feminist discourse than other, more marginalized groups [20]. Similarly, from our findings, we see that activists and bystanders with closer connections to the privileged middle classes have more control over the directions and results of cultural change movements in India. In this, we also extend the work done by Michie et al [54] and others in complicating the binary between slacktivism and activism [48,63]. This study situates bystander targeting at several points on a spectrum from meaningful interaction to transient, passive support: transformation occurred only when activists struck a balance between social media and other efforts, initially reaching bystanders through social media platforms but eventually converting these bystanders through more traditional offline activity, or encouraging bystanders themselves to engage in offline, one-on-one proselytization. Thus, our findings corroborate theories of light-touch, connective action [9,10] as the primary mode of activism online, tying this mode of activism to the bystander audiences present on social media.

4.2 Activist Perspectives on Social Media

One of the major contributions of our work is an exploration of how activists view and interact with social media in their day-to-day practice and at meetings, rallies, and events, and the ways in which they conceptualize and carry out their work through social media platforms. Through this, we add to the project started by Kow. et al. in documenting and understanding the micro-activities of actors

and activists in doing the work of creating, consolidating, and sustaining movement frames on social media [44].

Activist attitudes towards social media were complicated, and at times contradictory, with almost every activist we spoke to considering social media to some extent as simultaneously necessary, insufficient, and precarious. There was a general consensus that there was no avoiding social media as a space for movement activities, as bystanders become ever more crucial to determining mainstream media relevance and political success.

However, there was no activist who felt that social media was sufficient to reach out to bystanders, and the most prized movement activity was still the old-fashioned, face-to-face bystander conversion, with many activists recounting fond memories of changing an individual's mind through a conversation, rally, or workshop. We often observed a deep-seated, visceral anxiety about the precarity of social media success, particularly around the perceived importance, but fickleness, of bystander audiences.

As with framing, activist perceptions of social media on these axes was often informed by the type of SMO they worked with. Particularly for more grassroots, political movements, social media was a space that felt both alien and alienating, and sometimes antithetical to movement values of anti-corporatism and anti-capitalism. The fact that the use of social media then felt necessary to gain a voice in the political conversation was the cause of distress and disillusionment for some activists.

This highlights the ways in which social media, due to its affordances and demographics, is now a space in which the dominant political discourse is contested and decided. At a basic level, this calls for designers working in this space to consider the ways in which social media has become an unavoidable zone of contention for activists, and remain cognizant of the ways in which the design of these platforms necessarily excludes certain issues, movements, and temporalities of change. Further, technology designers should take into account the class and demographic makeup of a social movement's working context in order to create appropriate tools for growing and sustaining social movements, particularly in the ways that activists themselves need, want, and hope for. This appears to be a potentially rich area of work for designers with interest in designing tools for digital activism.

5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

There are notable limitations to our study. First, we have not been able to cover spontaneous movements or smaller regional movements, which are an important part of the social movement ecosystem. Second, we focused on activists that either worked in or spent time in major urban centers, meaning that our insights may not be generalizable to India as a whole. Third, it is important to note that the perspectives captured here are from the activist side, without an in-depth look at how bystander audiences received and processed these movement frames. Fourth, we have focused on middle-class bystanders in this study, due to the demographics and characteristics of social media use in India – however, movements

have many bystander audiences, both online and offline, that are worthy of study. For example, community media platforms catering to low-literate or otherwise marginalized users, such as Gram Vaani, CGNet Swara, and Video Volunteers, have showed considerable promise in engaging often-neglected bystander audiences in activism and political discourse [14,15,56,57]. In the future, we hope to distill, analyze, and map a wider array of bystander perspectives, in order to understand more thoroughly the processes and possibilities of designing for a digital activism less constrained by structures of caste, class, and gender.

6 CONCLUSION

Whereas previous work has mostly focused on social media as a space for movement recruitment, protest organization, community action, and story-sharing [23,44,48,63,79,83], we extend research scholarship by highlighting the ways in which social media functions as a medium for bystander targeting. We expand upon previous understandings of movement bystanders as monolithic crowds, and construct the bystander audience as a thinking, feeling entity, with its own class- and geography -influenced preferences, identities, and preoccupations. By situating both activists and bystander audiences in the Indian class and cultural context, we observe and analyze the ways in which this context informs and limits the frame alignment process. We see how social media itself, as a class-segregated entity, has become an active player in deciding which issues and movements are given the privilege of public consideration and support, and which are intentionally and algorithmically sidelined.

Further, although previous research has considered *what* social movements have been able to accomplish on social media, and *under what conditions* they have been successful, there has been less study as to *how* this happens, and less work that considers the reflexivity and subjectivity of the participant. Through interrogating how movement activists themselves imagine and relate to social media platforms in their work, we reconfigure the terrain of social media as not simply a location for movement activities, but as a constructed entity, participating in and affecting the daily practice of activism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Drupa Dinnie-Charles, Simiran Lalvani, and Manu Chopra for their feedback. We also extend our deepest gratitude to the activists we interviewed for this work, who freely donated their time, space, and hard-won knowledge to this project, in the midst of doing impactful, incredible, and inspiring work in their communities every day.

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