A Comprehensive Study of Social Media's Influence on Political Activism and Mobilization

RajyalaxmiKukkala
Research Scholar
Dr. Ritesh Mishra
(Professor)
Glocal School of Art & Social Science

Abstract

We may reasonably argue that social media has permeated every aspect of our life, from political mobilisation to education and from communication to social awareness. The impact that social media has today on its users—more precisely, their involvement with it—is enormous, especially when it comes to social media and political mobilisation. Due to social media's enormous influence on its users, campaigning for elections—whether local or national—is now considered incomplete without taking into account the campaign's social media strategy. Every facet of the parties' platforms, programmes, candidates, and even performances can be monitored and is heavily reliant on social media. Additionally, compared to traditional media, social media enables politicians and political parties to communicate directly and more widely with the public at a lower cost. The number by itself illustrates the current reach of social media, and it goes without saying that young people in India make up the bulk of social media users. Analysis of social media posts in a Facebook group centred on the topic of Indian high-stakes testing refusal was done to learn more about how people and groups utilise social media to participate in political protest against educational policy. Facebook posts were classified according to three main themes: the reasons for not supporting high-stakes testing; if the posts mentioned traditional or virtual forms of political protest; and whether the posts included links

to other social media platforms. In order to enhance the Facebook analysis, interviews with participants in the Test Refusal Movement were carried out. These interviews offered a more detailed perspective of how movement members operate in online affinity spaces and how new forms of protest have altered, but not replaced, traditional political protest against policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

It would not be hyperbole to argue that the internet has affected many aspects of our lives in the modern day. Additionally, as time goes on, the opportunity to use social media and the internet to further advance politics is emerging. Politicians and political parties are now embracing social media to connect with voters in new and creative ways, transforming the way that politics was historically communicated.

Social media has drastically changed everything from the way elections were conducted to how the general public interacted with elected or running ministers. Social media has impacted so many facets of our life that it has even altered how politics was conducted. Social media's widespread use in politics has increased public accessibility to and accountability of elected officials and political parties. The reason for this is that the general public can now communicate with those in positions of authority via a variety of channels, all from the comfort of their own homes.

Furthermore, it is much more important for those running for office or in positions of authority to carefully control their public perception given social media's ability to instantly disseminate content to millions of people. Social media has not only made political campaigning easier, but it has also opened up a lot of channels for continuous communication between the public and party officials at all levels. Furthermore, youth have enormous potential because they make up the bulk of social media users.

The Statistics Portal projects that the number of people using social media in 2022 was approximately 325.2 million, or 32.52 crore, and that number will rise to approximately 350.9 million, or 35.09 crore, in 2023. Social media is now a crucial component of political communications during election campaigns in recent years. Instant messaging and chat rooms have replaced social media as the primary means of communication since the internet's inception. In the realm of online communication, social media is the newest and fastest-growing phenomenon.

Social media was widely utilised by nearly all political parties and candidates, including the current prime minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to connect with the electorate during the Indian general elections of 2018 and 2023. Therefore, it wouldn't be incorrect to state that social media has been widely used by practically every political party and candidate to organise voters, and that social media is now crucial to political mobilisation. Political communication scholars were quite interested in the recent spectacular rise and popularity of social media use.

The use of social media and its political impact on the public's ability to engage with politicians or find out new information is the issue that needs to be considered in this situation. Every facet of the parties' platforms, programmes, candidates, and even performances can be monitored and is heavily reliant on social media. Additionally, compared to traditional media, social media enables politicians and political parties to communicate directly and more widely with the public at a lower cost.

Social media is very important when it comes to the public realm and communication in today's digital age. Social media has been used extensively, especially in political contexts. Popular social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to boost political engagement. However, Twitter, a microblogging platform, has made it easier for political institutions to share their opinions on a public forum.

This promotes the public expression of political viewpoints while also aiding in the dissemination of general knowledge. Young people are not the only ones that find social media to be popular. It has succeeded in drawing users from a variety of backgrounds. Politicians, political organisations, political foundations, and other entities in particular have grasped the

benefits of social media use. As a result, social media profiles and neighbourhood associations are being utilised more frequently to foster political dialogue and establish direct communication with individuals.

In India, social media has demonstrated great promise, and it wouldn't be incorrect to argue that it has lowered the distance between the public and political parties. For the same reason, today's political parties need to use social media for communication purposes in addition to maintaining their traditional websites and sending out press releases. In fact, using social media has become almost as crucial as conventional communication tactics. Today's politicians cannot hope to connect with the public by using only the antiquated methods.

1.1.Social Media and Politics

The extensive usage of social media during the 2018 and most recent 2023 elections in India is still recalled. The majority of prominent members of the major political parties were quite engaged on social media during the time of those elections. Given the progress that social media has made, it is hard to believe that it is still relatively young. Due to its similarity, it has contributed significantly to Indian democracy. Political parties are quickly adopting social media in an effort to inspire citizens. There are many ways in which social media can be an efficient instrument for political communication. Following is a list of a few of them:

- **A Platform to Present Opinions:** Politicians can openly express their opinions to the public via social media without facing constraints from journalists or other media outlets. Also, social media offers incredibly high speeds and accessibility.

- **Organize Public Opinion:** Social media removes barriers between people and places, putting politicians and political parties on the same stage. This makes communication efficient and quick.

- **Interaction with Fans:** Without involving any institutional or bureaucratic red tape, social media has provided politicians with an extra means of communicating with their supporters.

- **A Novel Method to Engage Voters:** With all of the communication channels that social media provides now, it seems like a bygone era when politicians had to rely solely on

cardboard, cutouts, posters, graffiti, banners, and in-person canvassing to win over people. Without social media, it is quite difficult to finish any kind of communication these days.

Given the evolving landscape of Indian politics, political parties and individual politicians have discovered a fresh and undoubtedly successful approach to engaging with the younger demographic.

1.2.Objectives

- To look at the quantity and kind of online conversations, sharing, and involvement with political causes in order to assess how social media platforms affect the dynamics of political activism.

- To examine how social media platforms aid in the planning of events, the sharing of information, and the recruitment of members for political movements in order to assess the role that these platforms play in inspiring people to take up political action.

- To evaluate the degree to which online interactions result in offline political engagement and activism, as well as the influence social media has on public opinion and political discourse.

- To investigate the possible drawbacks and dangers of social media's impact on political activism, such as the propagation of false information, polarisation, and the effect of algorithmic content curation on the range of political viewpoints available online.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Baumer and Van Horn (2014)provide a thorough framework that enhances policy analysis by looking at it from the varying angles of different policy domains and strategic actors. The chief executive, courtroom, living room, boardroom, bureaucratic, and cloakroom are the six key realms identified by the writers. Every domain encompasses distinct actors and procedures, revealing the complex fabric of policy formulation and execution. This strategic lens clarifies the complex dynamics that form policymaking and improves understanding by highlighting the range of influences and interactions that affect how policies are implemented in different areas of government.

Bennett (2016)explores the controversial topic of opting out of standardised testing, focusing on the worries and reasons that lead parents to take this different course. The study carefully examines the complexities of the opt-out movement, illuminating the complex viewpoints that support this decision about education. Bennett's work sheds light on possible impacts on education policy and provides important insights into the larger ramifications of the opt-out movement by dissecting the reasons. The study adds to a better understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding standardised testing and its influence on educational systems by providing a detailed analysis of parental decisions.

Buckshot (2015)discusses a growing trend in New York State where parents are opting to keep their kids out of standardised testing. The paper highlights the scope of this opt-out movement, illuminating its broad appeal and its implications for how educational testing may develop in the future. As more parents follow suit, questions regarding the usefulness and validity of standardised testing become more prevalent. This calls for a review of testing procedures and regulations within the larger framework of education. The article urges a critical analysis of the effects on educational norms and makes indications about a paradigm change in evaluation techniques.

Castells (2012)explores how social movements have been affected by the internet's transformation. According to him, new forms of social action have emerged in the internet sphere, characterised by networks of optimism and fury that are interconnected. This viewpoint is especially useful when analysing the accomplishments of campaigns such as the education opt-out campaign. It is clear that the internet has played a significant role in facilitating broad mobilisation and upending conventional wisdom in educational policy. Social media platforms enable movements to recruit followers, organise, and disseminate information by creating dynamic networks. This eventually transforms the traditional dynamics of activism in the modern digital era.

Diani (2013)examines the complex relationships between social movements and organisational fields, arguing that these movements are not independent entities but rather are deeply entangled in the larger organisational context. Diani emphasises the need of understanding how digital

tools and platforms operate within the larger organisational context by stressing this interconnectedness. His point of view sheds light on the crucial role that organisational fields play in determining the dynamics of social movements, highlighting the smart use of digital resources by movements to rally support and promote group action. This realisation is crucial to understanding the complex interactions that exist between social movements and the constantly changing digital tool and platform ecosystem.

Earl and Kimport (2011) Examine critically how the internet has transformed social transformation. They claim that the advent of digital technologies has completely changed the social movement environment by opening up new channels for communication and mobilisation. Notwithstanding these advantages, the writers issue a warning, emphasising how easily people in positions of power can co-opt digital tools. They emphasise how crucial it is for social movements to avoid the possible dangers of digital activism and how important it is to have a sophisticated awareness of the intricate relationships that exist between technology and power in order to effect real social change.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to comprehend the relationship between social media and the Test Refusal Movement's mobilisation process, protest strategies, and ideology, this study employed a mixed methods content analysis methodology. The study looked at 1,460 posts made over a 70-day period leading up to and including the 2023 India PARCC testing window by members of the 10,500+ member Facebook group Refuse State Standardized Tests India. This includes every post made during that time period, but excludes the comments made in response to those postings because some discussions went off subject and some were removed by participants when disagreements got too intense.

Some parents created this Facebook group to provide support to Indian parents who were thinking about opting out of their children's PARCC tests. It soon became the hub of the online affinity space for the Test Refusal Movement and a sizable, vibrant Facebook community. The group accepted members at their request, including those from different states, and administrators hardly ever kicked someone out (This only seemed to happen if a person posted

highly inappropriate or offensive content.). The Facebook group was actually open to everyone, even though Facebook's classification system labelled it as "closed." Posters knew that more than 10,500 people would be seeing their content when they posted in the group.

After obtaining an additional sample of six movement activists through interviews, the first author used personal ties inside the movement to recruit participants via e-mail requests. The IRB Committee of the Rutgers University Office of Research Regulatory Affairs gave its approval to the protocol (approval number E17-310). Written informed consent was acquired from the study subjects. During the interviews, the first author clarified that she was a researcher, a parent, and a member of the board of education, and that she had substantial prior awareness of both the Test Refusal Movement and PARCC.

Because they did not feel compelled to explain every detail of the background and context, participants appeared to be more forthcoming and the interviews ran more smoothly as a result. Interviewees were asked to recollect past experiences and emotions in response to certain questions. Three women from suburban school districts, one woman from a rural school district, and two women from urban school districts made up the interviewees. There was one wealthy district and three middle-class or middle-class/working-class districts.

The sample accurately reflected the movement's leadership. The majority of the movement's leaders were female, and activists from underprivileged urban and rural areas were underrepresented in the movement's top ranks. Refusal rates were somewhat lower in poorer districts. This might be related to the fact that a number of India's biggest metropolitan districts were subject to state supervision and might have been subject to punitive actions (such Corrective Action Plans, loss of Title I funds, and other punishments) if they refused to take part in testing.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

The text of each post is examined in this research, but the content of the comments that are linked to each post is not. The Refuse State Standardized Tests India Facebook page saw increased activity in the spring of 2023, especially as the PARCC testing session got closer (see

Figure 1). An increase in posts coincided with the start of the PARCC testing period. Although districts and schools differed in when they administered tests, most of them started in April, which also happened to be the month when the Facebook group was at its most active. Remarkably, the two days with the most posts were April 25, the day of the state-wide PARCC test platform meltdown, and May 12, the day of an India State Board of Education meeting where a large number of movement members demonstrated. This comprehensive timeline of Facebook activity shows how the community responded to significant occasions leading up to the PARCC testing period.
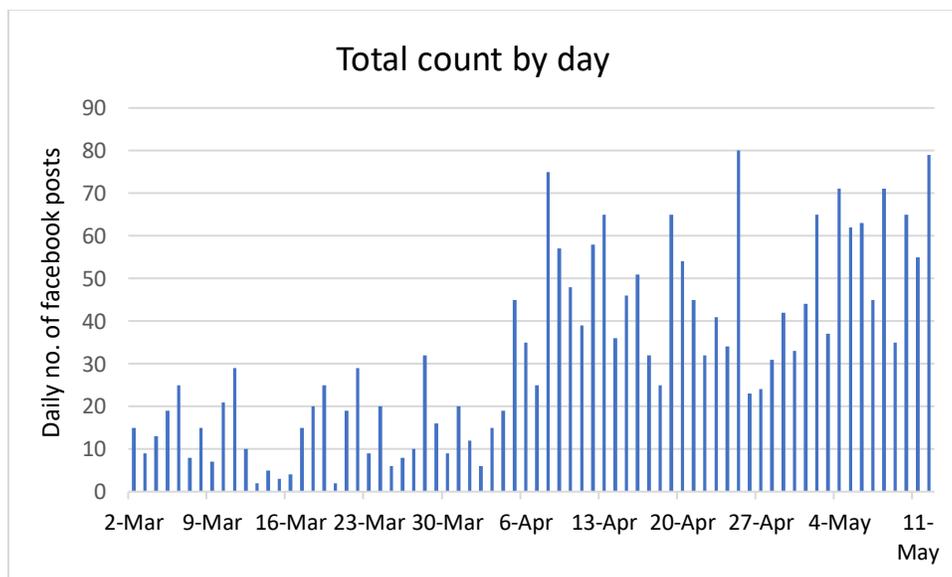

Figure 1: Facebook post count per day, spring 2023.

The graphic that is being given depicts a time series dataset that runs from March 2 to May 12. The first few days show slight variations, but a notable uptick is noted between March 8 and 11, with a high on March 29. Days that follow show varied degrees of steadiness and volatility, culminating in a notable peak on April 20th at 54. The values continuously fluctuate after this high, with major peaks occurring on April 25 (80), May 4 (71), and May 12 (71). (79). Around 65, the timeline's final portion remains very stable. The information suggests probable occurrences or influences for April 8, 25, and May 12. Overall, there has been a noticeable rising trend since the beginning of April, and anomalies—especially the high value on April 25—may

call for additional research. Accurate interpretation necessitates understanding the particular characteristics of the data, which are not yet known.

Table 1: Types of strategies used in protest.

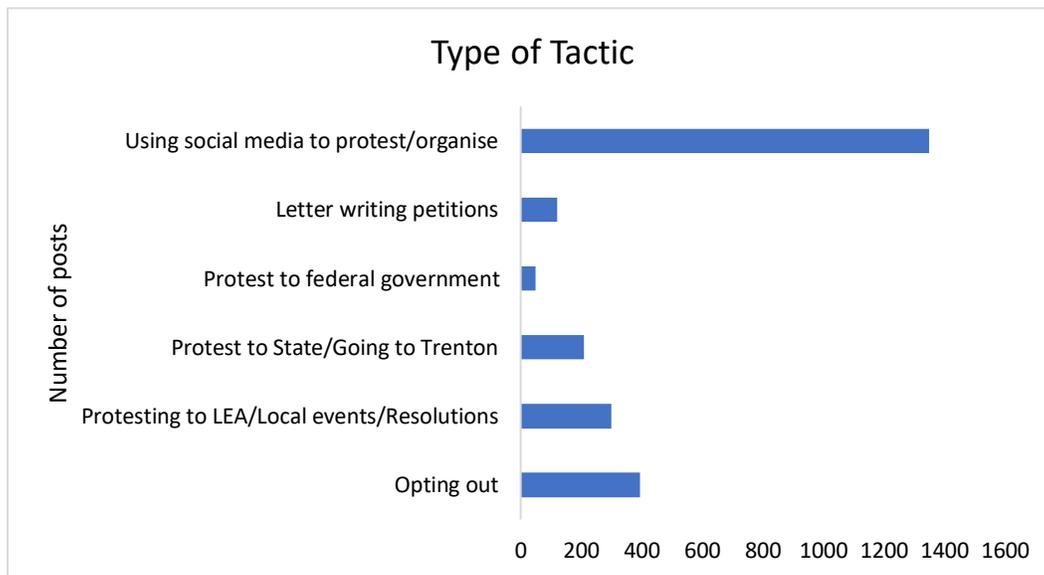| Type of tactic	No. of posts
Opting out	395
Protesting to LEA/Local events/Resolutions	300
Protest to State/Going to Trenton	210
Protest to federal government	50
Letter writing petitions	120
Using social media to protest/organize	1350

Figure 2: Types of strategies used in protest.

The chart figure illustrates how posts are distributed across various approaches. It looks like a bar chart, with the number of posts on the y-axis and the matching tactic type on the x-axis. The height of the bars would change according on how many posts were linked to each strategy. With a value of 1350, the method "Using social media to protest/organize" has the highest bar in this chart, suggesting that it is the most frequently used among the posts. "Opting out" (395), "Protesting to LEA/Local events/Resolutions" (300), and "Protest to State/Going to Trenton"

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(400) would be the next highest bars after this (210). Because these strategies are used less frequently, the thresholds for "Letter writing petitions" (120) and "Protest to federal government" (50) would be substantially shorter. The largest bars in this graphic depiction show the most often used strategies in the context of the data, providing a rapid and easy way to compare the popularity of various approaches.

Table 2: Forms of protest strategies on social media**.**

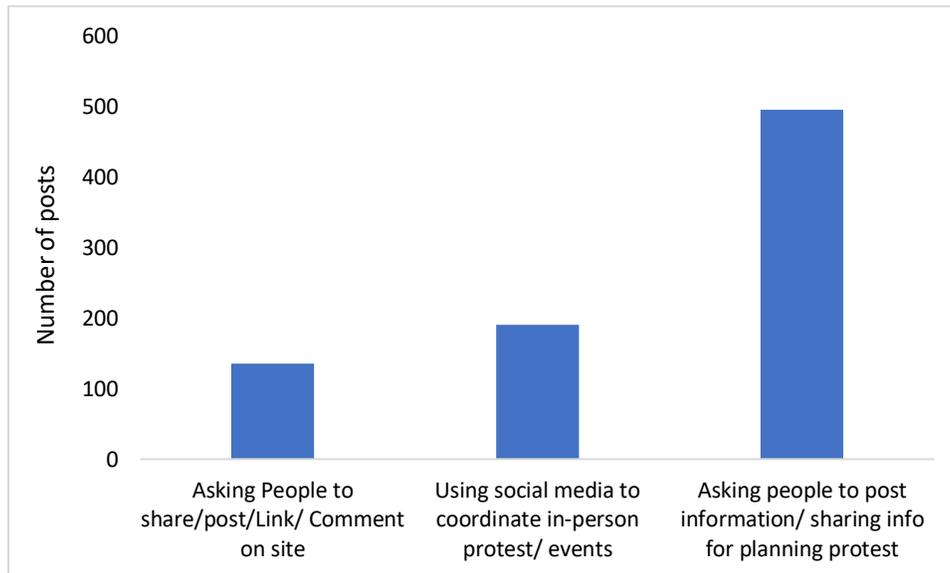| Types of tactics	Number of posts
Asking People to share/post/Link/ Comment on site	135
Using social media to coordinate in-person protest/ events	190
Asking people to post information/ sharing info for planning protest	495

Figure 3: Forms of protest strategies on social media.

The distribution of posts across various social media protest strategies is visually shown in the figure labelled "Types of Social Media Protest Tactics," which is related with Table 2. It probably looks like a bar chart, with the number of posts on the y-axis and the different tactics mentioned on the x-axis. Every tactic has a bar that represents it; the height of the bar indicates how many posts have been made on that particular tactic. With 495 posts, "Asking people to post

information/sharing info for preparing protest" has the highest bar in the chart, showing that this strategy is the most frequently used among the postings. The next two highest bars would be "Asking People to share/post/Link/Comment on site" (190) and "Using social media to arrange in-person protest/events" (190). (135). The popularity of various social media protest strategies is quickly and easily compared with this graphic depiction, where the tallest bar denotes the most widely used approach based on the data presented.

The information demonstrates the two different social media impacts. The Test Refusal Movement's rapid expansion served as a prime illustration of supersize effects. The Internet decreased the time and financial costs associated with protesting, accelerated the pace of information and communication transmission, and altered the scope of mobilisation. Theory 2.0 Effects were seen in many of the strategies used in the Refuse State Standardized Tests India Facebook group. Broad targets and purposes, large-scale e-tactics produced by individuals or small groups of people, organisation that occurred without physical co-presence, and a new digital repertory of e-tactics were all present.

Table 3: Kinds of links that are included in Facebook posts.

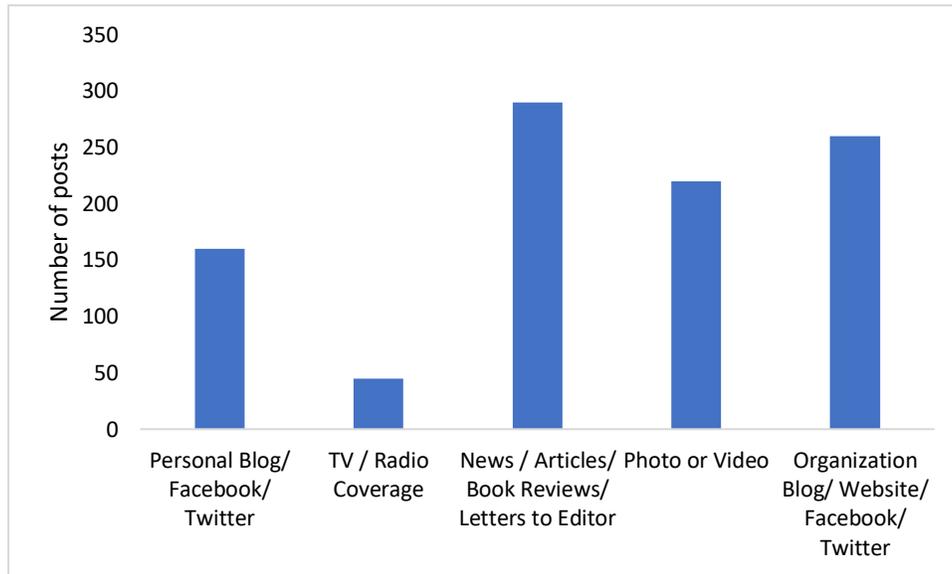| Links embedded	No. of posts
Personal Blog/ Facebook/ Twitter	160
TV / Radio Coverage	45
News / Articles/ Book Reviews/ Letters to Editor	290
Photo or Video	220
Organization Blog/ Website/ Facebook/ Twitter	260

Figure 4: Kinds of links that are included in Facebook posts.

To visually depict the distribution of postings across various link categories, Table 3, "Types of links embedded in Facebook post," might be represented as a column chart. The number of posts would be represented by the y-axis, and the x-axis would probably list the different kinds of embedded links. Analysis of the possible column chart: The graph displays the variety of links included in the dataset's Facebook postings (see Figure 3). With 290 posts, "News / Articles / Book Reviews / Letters to Editor" is the tallest column, suggesting a strong focus on exchanging written content and news-related information. The category "Organization Blog / Website / Facebook / Twitter" comes in close second with 260 posts, indicating a high level of interaction with online content from organisations. 160 posts are categorised as "Personal Blog / Facebook / Twitter," suggesting a noticeable but rather modest use of personal media. A column with 220 posts that displays "Photo or Video" material highlights the significance of visual media within the postings. With 45 entries, "TV / Radio Coverage" is the least used category, indicating a lesser frequency of postings with links to broadcast media sources. This graphic illustrates the various ways that links can be included into Facebook posts in a concise manner, making it evident which kinds are more common than others.

5. CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study provides a thorough investigation and elaboration of current theories, offering a nuanced viewpoint on how social media strategies within the Test Refusal Movement augment and strengthen conventional protest tactics. Using data from two sources, the study explores the ideas and experiences of movement participants, improving our comprehension of the sudden emergence of opposition to high-stakes testing. The examination pinpoints intricate elements of political protest within the context of post-industrial neoliberalism, unveiling a convergence of people and institutions from disparate origins uniting behind a same goal. The movement against high-stakes testing uses a wide range of institutional and non-institutional strategies to protest different organisations, such as local school boards, businesses, and government agencies. The movement's skillful use of both real and virtual places for protest actions is notably what makes it special. With social media accounting for 84% of posts, it was crucial and helped create an unprecedented level of political mobilisation. The study identifies Theory 2.0 Effects, which emphasise social media engagement in e-tactics, and Supersize Effects, which are defined by rapid and large-scale mobilisation. Disparities in district mobilisation patterns were seen, nevertheless, with wealthy areas showing higher rates of rejection. Repressive strategies, such threats and penalties, disproportionately affected weaker groups. While noting participant demographic constraints, the study highlights the affinity space's transformative impact in the Test Refusal Movement. It is clear that social media has an impact on political mobilisation and consciousness-raising since these new online channels both enhance and change more conventional forms of political engagement. Although social media was essential for recruitment and coordination, it supplemented rather than replaced conventional protest techniques. The results highlight how social media is influencing political activism in modern movements and how it is changing.

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RajyalaxmiKukkala
Dr. Ritesh Mishra