

13 Days Vs 11 Years: A Comparative Study of the Online Campaigns of Anna Hazare & Irom Sharmila

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Abstract

Corruption is an issue of which people everywhere are victims. There are other human right related problems which go unnoticed when corruption takes the headlines. Irom Sharmila has been fasting for many years. Media had never projected her plight for justice except in very few occasions. At the same time the India Against Corruption Movement led by Anna Hazare got immense support from the public through large scale media coverage. This paper is an attempt to analyze how social media reacted to both these issues by undertaking a Content Analysis of the facebook pages of “FREE IROM SHARMILA!!!! REPEAL THE AFSPA!!!!” and “India Against Corruption”. The study is conducted using the posts and comments on both these pages during and after the 13 days fasting of Anna Hazare. The study reveals that people began to show more interest in the case of Irom Sharmila after the movement of Anna Hazare. It is found that Social Media started playing its role in this Human Right movement too.

INTRODUCTION

We have witnessed certain movements which started online transforming into an all consuming fire like protest in different parts of the world in the recent past. The revolution 2.0, the Arab Springs, the Occupy Wall Street movement etc., are some of the examples. In India too we had some unique movements. Anna Hazare's campaign against corruption is a good example. Now there is another interesting scenario seen in the Social Media. People have started joining a movement online (which later turned out to be a protest in the streets too) for supporting Irom Sharmila who is on a fast for the last 11 years. There are many commonalities between these two movements. There are many clear differences too. There are movements which gain momentum from its very moment of beginning because of the rich resources available for it. At the same time there are other movements which after a very long time of survival leave no glimpse of its existence even. This paper researches on these commonalities and variations in these two different campaigns. It also tries to find out the reasons why the Anna Hazare movement gained popularity at once and his fasting ended on the 13th day, whereas the Movement by Irom Sharmila couldn't do that magic even after the completion of 11 years.

SOCIAL MEDIA & MASS MOVEMENTS

Social Media could revolutionize the process of organizing a mass movement by becoming an important resource for the mobilization of collective action, organization, and implementation of social movements around the world. The development of social media in the latter phase of the first decade of the 21st century had organized Web-fuelled social movements (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). This kind of cyber-activism was instrumental in changing the patterns of collective action. The web 2.0 platform of the social media makes communication a highly interactive activity like that in a circle of peers in the real world. In other words social media establishes a circle of peers among a set of otherwise unknown virtual identities. These individuals make real opinions which are almost accessible to a larger set of individuals -peers (Neuwirth et al, 2007). Social media technologies have been used especially in organizing and implementing collective activities, promoting a community feeling and sense of belongingness among the group members, establishing connections with other social movements, and publicizing causes to gain support from the global community.

The major cyber-activism movements include antiwar, anti-globalization, and global justice movements. The 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in Seattle marked the beginning of the global justice cyber movement (Lievrouw, 2011). In the Iraqi antiwar movement, the use of the Internet resulted in global protests that brought together about 10 million activists who demonstrated in hundreds of cities worldwide on February 15, 2003 (Cortright, 2007). Again, the Internet has enabled the creation of diverse democratic groups and movements, such as the World Social Forum, which mobilized global justice movements of more than 100,000 diverse activists in Brazil in 2003, and in Mumbai in 2004 (Langman, 2005). These are some of the examples of the cyber activism – movements in the recent past.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to resource mobilization theory, a core, professional group in a social movement organization works towards bringing money, supporters, attention of the media, alliances with those in power, and refining the organizational structure. The major advocates of the theory, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald argue that Social Movements need the above resources to be effective, because dissent and grievances alone will not generate social change (McCarthy and Zald, 2001).

The theory is based on the notion that resources—such as time, money, organizational skills, and certain social or po-

¹ “What is civil society?” Centre for Civil Society, Philippine Normal University. 2004-03-01. Retrieved 2006-10-30.

litical opportunities—are critical to the success of social movements. At its inception, resource mobilization theory was unlike earlier theories of collective action in its treatment of social movements as normal, rational, institutionally rooted activities that are structured and patterned, thus allowing for analysis in terms of organizational dynamics (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Although types of resources vary among social movements, the availability of applicable resources, and of actors' abilities to use them effectively, are critical. In contrast to psychological variables considered by other social movement theories, resource mobilization theory was the first to recognize the importance of influences outside the social movement under study (Johnson, 2000).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In their examination of the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in 2001 and the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002, Della Porta and Mosca (2005) found that Internet-based communication technologies provide an important additional resource for social movements implemented by "resource poor" actors, offering a means for mass communication that may have previously been restricted by financial, temporal, or spatial constraints.

A study by Colin J Beck came out with the finding that terrorism is a form of contentious politics, analyzable with the basic social movement approach of mobilizing resources, political opportunity structure, and framing (Beck, 2008). The classic view of outcomes in social movement research is that either a movement is successful in achieving its goals and is subsequently institutionalized (like the professionalization resource mobilization theorists find), or that the movement fails and it disappears (Beck). Recent research has found that protest can have effects on Congressional voting and policy making (McAdam and Su 2002), even if a movement is not wholly successful. Rudd and Olzak (2004) also find that collective action can influence policy in interaction with public opinion and elite support.

METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE:

The researcher undertook a qualitative content analysis of the sample text collated from the social networking site Facebook. Facebook and twitter were widely used by "team Anna" – the organizers of the India Against Corruption Campaign – to promote themselves and their ideas. The researcher purposively selected thirteen discussion threads posted across thirteen days (August 16 to 28, 2011) during which Mr. Hazare went on a fast at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi demanding the implementation of his version of the Lokpal Bill called the Jan Lokpal Bill.

The threads were selected based on the number of "likes" received by the initiating posts made by the administrators of the India Against Corruption 'page' on Facebook. Only the posts made in English were selected for the analysis. These thirteen units differ from each other in terms of the number of comments made and the number of "likes" received apart from the differences in the discussion topics

itself.

In the case of Irom Sharmila, the researcher analyzed all the posts in the facebook page "FREE IROM SHARMILA!!!! REPEAL THE AFSPA!!!!!" from the day on which Anna Hazare stopped fasting (August 28, 2011) up to December 8, 2011. All the posts and comments made in English were selected for the study.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

As of December 8, 2011, the Community - FREE IROM SHARMILA!!!! REPEAL AFSPA!!!! - has just 3285 members. But the facebook community on India Against Corruption has over 3 lakhs members. The researcher here makes an analysis of both these campaigns separately and later compares both.

The Irom Sharmila Campaign organized people based on the following themes.

1. By posting the different kinds of activities of different groups of people at different places
 - a. Artists for Sharmila @ Mumbai on Dec 9
 - b. BHRPC to observe fasting and demonstration for repeal of AFSPA
 - c. SSSC (Save Sharmila Solidarity Campaign) has organized a Srinagar to Imphal – Save Sharmila Jan Caravan covering 4,500 km across 10 states.
 - d. Performances & Street Plays
 - i. Ojas is performing a monoact on Le Mashale - the soliloquy in which Irom Sharmila narrates the anguish and aspiration of Manipur through its fables
2. By making people aware of the injustice done to Irom Sharmila through posting the Booklets, documentaries and films on Irom Sharmila
3. By posting Irom Sharmila's appeal to the people on the Day when her fast turned 11 year old
 "We've learnt to forego truth" which was handed over to Rediff.com on November 30
4. By making political comments with references to the Military
 - a. The state government in Manipur is forcefully evicting families living on Loktak. Since Tuesday, the state police have used brute force to chase alleged illegal settlers away from their homes including burning nearly 200 huts.
 - b. The people of Manipur go to the polls next year. If 31 of the 60 MLAs vote to remove the disturbed areas designation from all of Manipur not just Imphal then AF(SP)A is effectively repealed.
5. By asking people to send mails to the Defence Minister
 - a. to send an email to minister will take maximum 2-3 minutes
 just copy and paste then click 'send' button.....
 it's the smallest, simplest activity of a person to do for the sake of a lady, our sister, who is being on hunger strike for long 11 years only for achieving right to live freely in free India.....
6. By asking people to join the Celebration of Event Day -

We have dedicated 8th event day for Fast in solidarity with Irom Sharmila ...Lets make Human Rights a house hold concept

7. Urging students to join the campaign by posting stories of Universities taking active involvement

HYMS and HU student team successfully organized "Save Sharmila and Democracy" Campaign on 4th November 2011 @ Hyderabad University campus.

8. By posting upcoming activities at different parts of the country and asking to join them and make such programmes in other places too.

9. By Criticizing the Media

There is no free media in our country they take orders from one sitting in delhi and they are really good in making non issue as issue and making a issue into non issue.

10. By Giving Details about the programmes already conducted.

Fasting and demonstration in front of the district headquarters at Silchar, Assam was a big success. It ended at 5 pm when all hunger strikers took water and juice together and broke their fast. It was undertaken as a part of nationwide campaign of Save Democracy Repeal AFSPA to mark the 11th year of hunger strike

11. By posting articles from Newspapers

Irom's fight completes 11 yrs, continues - Hindustan Times

12. Through Emotional Appeals

Irom Sharmila's eleven year old battle, at its heart, now appears to me as a battle for love itself. It is to repeal AFSPA, yes. But it is, at its heart, asking the nation state to love its people, asking India to love the North-East, asking India to mother its people as a motherland. It is a demand for love.

13. By giving the news of attack to the Protest against AFSPA

a. Manipur Police have arrested 25 social activists of People's Caravan, who attempted to meet Irom Sharmila Chanu at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital here.

b. 19th Oct 2011: Save Irom Sharmila Jan Karvan attacked at Delhi (Indian Capital)

14. By asking it in the funny way. There were questions as of below posted on the wall to laugh at people's ignorance about Irom Sharmila and her noble cause.

Q: Do U know Katrina Kaif?

Ans: Ohh I know...a very cute girl.....

Q: Do U know Kareena Kapoor?

Ans: arey yaar she is my Dream Girl...

Q: Do U know who is she? (Showing the photograph of Irom Sharmila below)

15. By making it an issue of the North East people

The recent attack on members of the Save Sharmila Solidarity Campaign (SSSC) near the arts faculty in Delhi University brings to the fore endemic issues in the way the Indian state has dealt with conflict areas, namely the North East and Kashmir, and the fall out of the increasing militarisation in these areas. The march by the SSSC is an attempt at focusing national attention on the ramifications of the AFSPA,

which has been operational in the North East since 1958 and in Jammu Kashmir since 1990."

16. By posting the Common Man's Questions: Why can't 'they' hear Irom Sharmila?

a. It is AFSPA which is anti-Indian not Irom Sharmila

b. Does India care about Sharmila?

17. By making it an Issue of Humanitarian Concern

Irom Sharmila has been leading an unnatural life, out of choice and goaded by the Manipuri society, especially civil society groups. For nearly 11 years now, it has become a routine for her to remain housed in hospital, in judicial custody, with a tube dangling from her nostrils to force-feed her.

18. The Boxing champion Mary Kom affirms to emulate Sharmila's resilience in the ring

19. By asking people to join a movement in some unorganized places

someone in Chennai? Lets organize a rally

These were some of the tactics played in organizing people to support the 'Free Irom Sharmila' Campaign. Now let us have a look at the various ways in which Team Anna motivated people to join the forum.

1. The spirit of nationalism/patriotism is often invoked to garner more support for the movement. Every small event is either posted by the administrators of the page and local events as posted as comments to threads by people.

We come from all walks of life and converge at deshbhakti! Proud of being an Indian.

2. Creating a class based struggle seems to be one of the tactics where it is posted:

it's a movement of the middle class or the lower middle class against the rich

This class consciousness is a recurrent image in many more posts and it spills over to the streets in the form of marches and gatherings marking protest.

3. By narrating how different small movements are coming up in different parts of India and abroad in support of Anna Hazare.

Delhi Auto Union, Delhi lawyers, lawyers of Moradabad, IT employees wearing black bands and ribbons, march @ India gate, Lucknow (16/09/2011) and INDIA BANDH" On Thursday 18th Aug 2011 (17/09/2011) and questions like Y no marches held in Kerala?

4. Peer pressure and attempts to vilify those who do not support the movement are seen in plenty. The ones who are not with the movement are often called "traitors" and "Pakistanis". The case where Ms. Arundhati Roy is criticized vehemently and often vulgarly is one example that really stand out.

if u [do] not support it u r not Indian

those who do not participate in the fast of Anna is losing their precious moments of life

5. By equating the movement to a "Second Freedom struggle", a sense of validity and importance is created by the

people and at times by the organizers themselves.

6. Emotional content is posted quite frequently and the highly emotional narrative is powerful enough to charge and mobilize many a 'doubting Thomas'. Some examples are the ones like the story of the mother in search for her son who left the house to join Anna movement and the posts like:

a 74 year old man is fasting for you for the last 10 days

7. Effort to create an all inclusive movement is seen frequently in the posts. Deliberate efforts are made to reach out to the rich and the poor and people from all states and religions to participate in the movement.

Even the criminals in Tihar Jail were invited, old & young, rich & poor, people from all states....

Muslims who have largely stayed away from Anna Hazare's movement so far, are now likely to take part in it following the celebrated Islamic seminary, Darul Uloom, Deoband, coming out in its support

8. Generating anti establishment, apolitical and anti rich feelings is another tactic that has worked in favour of the movement. The feelings like "all politicians are corrupt" are amplified in these forums. The middle classes' hatred and apathy towards the powerful politicians and policy makers are seen throughout the discussions. A very strong anti-congress sentiment is seen in many of the posts and the congress party and its leaders are equated to corruption. This feeling was seen being transformed to the streets as well and in the later calls by Hazare himself to boycott the party's candidate in the Hisar by-election and the elections in the state assemblies.

9. Religious feelings are seen to be invoked to attract more people to the movement. Anna is described as the incarnation of "Dharma" and participating in the movement is described as a 'Life-time' experience like taking a dip in the Ganges.

sikh family coming with food when delhi police didn't give: God will provide support to the righteous in one way or the other :)

10. By equating Anna Hazare to Mahatma Gandhi, the propagandists aim to create an aura around the movement and to establish it as a legitimate and peaceful one. Anna and Arvind Kejriwal are projected as role models for the country as against the "corrupt politicians" of the country.

We have shown to the whole world how we won this battle peacefully in a democratic way !! So Gandhigiri (and now Annagiri) is still relevant in today's world !!

Our generation is lucky to witness another gandhian revolution, and a second Gandhiji!

11. Examples of and calls for small and big sacrifices give more appeal to the movement.

Now, I would also start AC of my car... only after Anna ji would break his fast ... I kept my AC closed as a small way of showing my concern for health of Anna ji since 16th Aug 2011 :) a small way !

12. Direct calls for more participation as a way of asking people to participate in the movement are also seen as on-ground participation starts declining after the initial days of Anna's fast.

13. Disseminating information regarding how to be part of the campaign/movement is one of the key features of the use of the facebook page – India Against Corruption. People are asked to participate in small ways by carrying the Indian flag on their vehicles, by sending registered posts supporting the movement to the Prime Minister's office etc.,

COMPARING THESE MOVEMENTS

When we go for a comparison of both these movements in their online versions based on the data available from the facebook pages I should confess the limitations I have. Here, only two facebook pages are taken for study. There are many other pages in support of both Anna Hazare and Irom Sharmila. I cannot go into the detailed analysis of all these pages and communities here. Instead let us focus on the content available from these two communities for the research. Both the online movements used almost the same styles for organizing people. But the Anna Hazare movement gained momentum at once and the number of members, comments, shares and likes were skyrocketed in fractions of seconds. The campaign for Irom Sharmila on the other hand doesn't have that 'mass' appeal. When there were more than 10,000 likes and 5,000 comments for many posts in the India Against Corruption page, the number of likes and comments for the posts in the Free Irom Sharmila page were less than 20. It shows the less interest of the people in Irom Sharmila's cause. It gives an understanding that corruption is a problem for all, whereas AFSPA is just a problem of some of the North Eastern states or Kashmir. Many comments were there in the page of Anna about the importance of the India Against Corruption movement. The elements we can list here are:

1. Age of Anna: The simple thought that a man of over 70 is fasting for the whole nation's welfare in itself created a emotional urge in people to join the movement atleast online.

2. Nobility and acceptability of the Cause: The theme of the crusade is corruption. Almost all the people of the country are suffering a lot because of this problem. So this created a mass psychological effect to be a part of the movement.

3. Time of launching the movement: The movement was launched when Indian media was full of 2G & 3G scam stories and pictures of ministers in Tihar jail. There would not have been a better occasion to launch such a movement against corruption.

4. PR campaigns of Team Anna: Many business management schools have already taken the Team Anna PR campaigns as a case study on how to hit headlines at the apt time. They did a great job by taking the issue to the traditional as well as the new media platforms at the same time

to attract the old and youth, the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural simultaneously.

5. Involvement of many Idols of the mass: many heroes and heroines of the people were part of this movement. Amir Khan, Shri Shri Ravi Shanker, Kiran Bedi were some of the idols who were active in this movement. Those who followed them or their ideologies automatically joined this movement too.

These are reasons which gave Anna Hazare's campaign an edge over the other.

Irom Sharmila's brother's comment was quoted in the Free Irom Sharmila page saying: "If Anna was born in Manipur and Sharmila born in New Delhi, things would have been just the reverse. For the mainstream media, northeast or things happening in the northeast hardly excites them -Singhjit Singh(Elder Brother of Irom)". If what he said is true that is a matter of concern again for the people from the 'mainland' of India.

As the Resource Mobilization Theory puts it, a social movement will be effective only if the organizers can work towards bringing money, supporters, attention of the media, alliances with those in power to their side. Team Anna could do that whereas the resource poor Irom Sharmila movement couldn't capitalize on the lesser resources they have. The Social Networking Media played a crucial role in gathering like-minded people against the problem of corruption. Even those who were unaware about the profile of Anna Hazare joined the campaign. The idea of being able to do something against corruption is what led to this. Another factor which helped in popularizing the movement was the way in which the public relations group of 'Team Anna' propagated their messages. 'Team Anna's' main target groups were the youth who are heavy users of the new media and the Indian middle class. When a team focused on the campaign through the traditional media, another team spread the message through the new media including the social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, Orkut etc. The campaigners understood the power of peer pressure on teenagers and youth and acted accordingly in such a way that there were only "YES" responses for the event's invitation which appeared in the Facebook pages of the youth. All these efforts helped in successfully mobilizing thousands of youth across the country and even abroad. The result was that even a month after the thirteen days long fast of Anna Hazare, the Jan Lokpal Bill remained the headline in leading national dailies. The Facebook page titled "India Against Corruption" and the twitter account "@janlokpal" played very significant roles in keeping followers updated and motivated.

Though both were mainly one-man shows the support for Anna's cause was because of the national interest on the subject of corruption. Again, there is clear evidence from the comments made in the IAC page that it is not an apolitical movement but which has a hidden agenda of targeting the Congress Party and its leaders. Most of the comments were against this particular party. The language used in the

page was aggressive and there were comments in vulgar language to those who opposed the Anna Hazare movement. But the language and operating style of the Irom Sharmila page are peaceful and calm. They didn't want to hurt anyone. They want not just the achievement of the goal but that to be achieved in a peaceful way. They know at the end what matters is the human relationships. That's why Irom Sharmila made a lamentation when the Jan Karawan was attacked and the people were not allowed to meet her: "The CM should know that they (campaigners) came all the way from Kashmir to Imphal. They should be treated as human beings with sympathy. Instead, they were denied by the Government to meet me. I'm deeply hurt by the Government's unwanted attitude towards them."

There were news articles posted in both the pages regarding Anna's meeting with Irom Sharmila. Some of the articles gave a hope to the supporters of Irom Sharmila that now with the popularity of Anna the AFSPA will be repealed and Irom Sharmila would be free.

Anna Hazare to meet Irom Sharmila soon - Full Story - Newzfirst

According to a report in the Mumbai press, Anna Hazare will soon travel to Manipur to personally request activist Irom Sharmila to end her 10 years long hunger strike

Later there were other news stories appearing in the newspapers that the Team Anna has decided not to join the Irom Sharmila Campaign.

Anna Team won't join hands with Irom Sharmila - Indian Express

Nobody knows why there was a sudden change in the mind of the think tank of Team Anna regarding this issue. It could be inferred that the Team was afraid of the success of the combined campaign. They didn't want to lose the image of the Team which they managed to create in a very short span of time.

Some of the supporters of Irom Sharmila penned down their thoughts regarding why Anna got popularity and Irom Sharmila still in trouble.

"Why has Hazare's movement been a success?

So why has Hazare's populist movement succeeded in eliciting a speedy response from a sluggish government machinery when Sharmila's didn't over 11 years?

It has much to do with the fact that corruption as a broad subject is easier understood by the Indian middle class than an obscure martial law that is perceived to have no bearing on the lives of the....."

"You say, Anti-corruption is an easy-to-market brand which consumes everyone who vouches for it...By contrast, Irom Sharmila presents a more complex choice before the average citizen. For Manipuris, she is a homegrown heroine who symbolises the fight against human rights violations by

the Army. But for those outside Manipur, she is just as likely to be seen as someone who is....”

“You know Anna Hazare who kept fast for a week against corruption. Because he got amazing media coverage, cabinet ministers met him; film stars went to attend his Anshan. You know Baba Ramdev. But you don’t know a Lady who is on indefinite fast from last 11 years to demand of repeal of an inhuman act imposed in North East....”

Irom Sharmila made some comments pouring out her mind as reported by some of the TV channels:

“Anna is a seasoned activist, I am a simple woman”: Irom Sharmila – NDTV Profit

“One day my fight also will be recognized”: Irom Sharmila – Hindustan Times

These comments of Irom Sharmila are indications of her disappointment on the sad plight of her campaign and at the same time portraying her goodwill and willpower to go forward to the goal she and all the people in Manipur are aiming at. That is why someone commented quoting Maha Shwetha Devi:

Irom Sharmila is the Iron lady of India....and “21st century will be known by this lady”

CONCLUSION

The India Against Corruption movement demonstrates the opportunities offered by social media for large-scale mobilization of social movements. The use of social media helped to draw local and international attention to the movement that otherwise may have been shielded from public view. Social media introduced speed and interactivity that were not possible through the reliance on traditional media.

Resource mobilization theory’s validity is proved through these two movements - India Against Corruption movement & FREE IROM SHARMILA!!!! REPEAL AFSPA!!!! The movements which can generate the resources well can gain easy publicity and popularity and that in turn may lead to the achievement of the goals of the movement. On the other hand those movements which are not able to mobilize the resources will fade away from the minds of the people.

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