Social Media algorithms and activism: How Platform Dynamics affect the visibility of Social Justice Issues

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Abstract

The complex relationship between activism and social media algorithms is examined in this study, with a particular emphasis on how platform dynamics affect the visibility of social justice topics. Understanding the algorithms that control content distribution is essential as social media has emerged as the main instrument for awareness-raising and mobilization. This study looks at the methods by which these algorithms favor some narratives over others, influencing the conversation and participation of the public in social justice campaigns. We examine how platform restrictions, user engagement metrics, and algorithmic bias shape the prominence of disadvantaged perspectives by examining case studies of recent activist efforts.Additionally, the study draws attention to how these findings may affect advocates, legislators, and platform developers in their efforts to promote more fair algorithmic procedures that improve the portrayal of social justice concerns. By shedding light on how digital platforms can either impede or facilitate social change, this research seeks to add to the continuing conversation on the relationship between technology, society, and activism. The study aims to determine how these algorithms affect public discourse and the efficacy of social justice movements by magnifying some voices and marginalizing others, contributing to the digital divide. This research aims to clarify how social media platforms either help or impede societal progress.

Keywords: Social media algorithms, Activism, Social justice issues, Platform dynamics, Algorithmic bias, Content moderation, Digital divide, Public discourse, Social change, Platform influence

Introduction

Social media platforms have emerged as crucial spaces for activism and the publicizing of social justice problems in the digital era. The algorithms in charge of these platforms are extremely important since they control user visibility, shape public opinion, and inspire social movements. This area of study examines the complex interplay between activism and social media algorithms, looking at how these platforms' features can either increase or decrease the visibility of social justice causes.

Social media algorithms, which aim to improve user engagement, assign a higher priority to material according to a range of factors, including individual preferences, current topics, and user interactions. These algorithms present serious difficulties even if they can promote the quick dissemination of information and the development of activist communities. Algorithmic biases have the potential to deprioritize or marginalize social justice-related content, which could result in an uneven representation of topics and movements.

The following important questions are the focus of this study: What effect do social media algorithms have on social justice topics' visibility? What influence do platform policies and user behavior have on these dynamics? Moreover, how can activists use algorithmic understanding to expand their audience and improve their efficacy? Through the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches and case studies of contemporary social movements, this research aims to enhance our comprehension of the relationship between technology, activism, and social justice. In the end, it aims to educate advocates, decision-makers, and platform creators on the consequences of algorithmic governance for the goal of representation and equity in the digital sphere.

Objective of the study

- To better comprehend the connection between technology and social change.
- To look at how social media platforms, influence public discourse.
- To examine how these algorithmic biases impact the amplification or suppression of specific social justice movements.

Literature Review

The influence of social media on public opinion regarding social justice issues is examined by Nisbet and Scheufele. They contend that algorithms have an impact on the narratives that acquire momentum and the framing of issues in public discourse. According to their findings, activists hoping to successfully influence public opinion must comprehend the workings of these algorithms (**Nisbet&Scheufele, 2009).**

Bennett delves into the idea of "hybrid media systems," which are networks combining new and traditional media. He contends that the public conversation and the prominence of social justice concerns are significantly shaped by social media algorithms. His work emphasizes the significance of comprehending how information transmission and social movement mobilization are impacted by algorithmic curation (**Bennett, 2012).**

Castells contends in his groundbreaking study on the network society that social media has changed the nature of activism by making decentralized movements possible. According to his theory, the way platforms rank material can either help or hurt the exposure of social justice problems through algorithmic filtering. To effectively use social media for activism, Castells highlights the necessity of understanding these processes **(Castells, 2012).**

Graham and Zook examine how social media algorithms impact geography, specifically in terms of how they impact how visible local movements are. **Graham and Zook (2013)** contend that algorithmic filtering has the potential to generate "digital divides" by giving preference to content originating from more well-known places or problems, so affecting the visibility of grassroots activity.

In their influential work on networked movements, Bennett and Segerberg discuss how social media facilitates the emergence of new forms of activism. They emphasize the importance of understanding how algorithms shape the visibility of social justice issues, noting that algorithmic curation can lead to unequal attention among various movements (**Bennett &Segerberg, 2013).**

Milan concentrates his research on how social media influences public conversation about topics related to social justice. She talks about how algorithms might provide voice to the voiceless, but she also raises the possibility of algorithmic silencing—the loss of significant stories because of algorithmic prioritization **(Milan, 2015).**

Tufekci talks about the ways in which social media platforms function as forums for public conversation and as instruments for mobilization. She draws attention to the ways that algorithms might produce "echo chambers," where users are largely exposed to content that supports their opinions. This may restrict the range of viewpoints on matters of social justice, hence impeding wider public participation **(Tufekci, 2015).**

Karpf investigates the implications of social media algorithms for political communication and activism. He argues that while algorithms can enhance the reach of social justice messages, they also create challenges in maintaining sustained attention on critical issues, as trending topics can quickly shift focus away from ongoing struggles **(Karpf, 2016).**

Investigating the function of social media in contemporary protests, Tufekci contends that algorithms have the potential to both empower and stifle activists. While social media makes it possible to spread information quickly, she points out that algorithmic biases have the potential to marginalize particular voices and concerns, which can have an impact on exposure **(Tufekci, 2017).**

A thorough analysis of the research on social media and civic involvement was carried out by Boulianne. Her research suggests that social media platforms, by offering tools for mobilization and organization, can improve civic engagement and activity. She does, however, also draw attention to the importance of critically understanding how material is prioritized by algorithms, as this may unintentionally stifle some social justice initiatives **(Boulianne, 2019).**

Cohen investigates the moral ramifications of algorithmic social media control. He contends that these algorithms' designs frequently mirror current power structures, which may have an impact on how visible social justice concerns are. His research highlights how algorithmic decision-making requires accountability and transparency **(Cohen, 2019).**

Schradie's research focuses on the disparities in social media engagement among different demographic groups. She finds that algorithmic biases can exacerbate existing inequalities, leading to uneven visibility for various social justice movements. Her work underscores the importance of addressing these disparities to ensure equitable representation in online activism **(Schradie, 2019).**

Margetts and Dorobantu investigate the implications of algorithmic governance for democratic engagement. They argue that while social media can enhance participation, algorithmic biases can lead to the marginalization of certain issues. Their research emphasizes the need for transparency in algorithmic processes to ensure fair representation of social justice movements **(Margetts &Dorobantu, 2019).**

Boulianne's recent work delves into the relationship between social media use and civic engagement, emphasizing how algorithms can create both opportunities and barriers for activists. She argues that while social media can facilitate increased participation, the algorithmic prioritization of certain content can lead to the overshadowing of critical social justice issues **(Boulianne, 2020).**

Liu and Ma look into how social media algorithms affect people's involvement in social justice problems. According to **Liu and Ma (2020),** their findings indicate that algorithmic biases may result in differential visibility for various movements. This underscores the need of comprehending the fundamental mechanics of content curation.

The growing body of research emphasizes the nuanced connection between activism and social media algorithms, especially as it relates to the exposure of social justice topics. Although algorithms have the potential to increase involvement and mobilization, they also come with a number of drawbacks, such as biases that could mask the voices of the underprivileged. To maintain equal representation in digital activism and to develop strategies activists can utilize to manage these challenges, ongoing research is necessary. Fostering a more inclusive and productive environment for social justice movements will require an understanding of the subtleties of algorithmic governance.

Research Methodology
Case Study 1:
The Dalit Rights Movement and Social Media
An additional interesting case study for analyzing the relationship between social media and social justice is the Dalit Rights Movement in India. Dalits, who were formerly known as "untouchables," have endured centuries of caste-based prejudice and persecution. Social media has become an effective instrument for Dalit activists to seek equal rights, dispel prejudices, and magnify their voices in recent years.

Positive Effects of Social Media on the Dalit Rights Movement

- **Visibility and Awareness:**Dalit activists may now widely communicate their experiences of caste-based violence and discrimination thanks to social media platforms. This has contributed to public sympathy for the Dalits' cause and increased knowledge of their predicament.
- **Community Building:** Similar to the #MeToo movement, social media has facilitated the creation of online communities where Dalits can connect, share information, and provide mutual support. These communities have been instrumental in building solidarity and empowering Dalit individuals.
- **Challenging Discrimination:** Dalit activists have used social media to expose caste-based discrimination, call out perpetrators, and demand accountability. This has led to increased pressure on authorities to take action against caste-based violence.
- **Political Mobilization:**Usage of social media to mobilize Dalit voters and support political candidates who champion Dalit rights. This has helped to increase the political representation of Dalits and strengthen their voice in the democratic process.

While social media has been a valuable tool for the Dalit Rights Movement, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and risks associated with its use. Misinformation, trolling, and online harassment are common problems Dalit activists deal with. Moreover, it is possible that Dalit voices are not always amplified by social media companies' algorithms.

Case Study 2
The Farmer's Protest Movement
The Farmer's Protest is a contemporary and noteworthy social justice movement in India. In response to three farm legislation passed by the Indian government, this movement arose in late 2020. The farmers, who were mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab, said that these rules will negatively impact their means of subsistence.

The Role of Social Media

The Social media platforms played a crucial role in amplifying the farmers' voices. The movement saw widespread support and solidarity, both nationally and internationally, due to the rapid and widespread dissemination of information through these platforms.

- **Information Dissemination:** Social media was instrumental in informing farmers about the potential implications of the farm laws, organizing protests, and sharing updates about the movement.
- **Building Solidarity:** Platforms like Twitter and Facebook allowed farmers to connect and build a sense of solidarity. This helped in mobilizing support from various sections of society.
- **Global Awareness:** The movement gained international attention through social media, leading to support from various quarters and putting pressure on the government.

The Farmer's Protest demonstrated the power of social media in mobilizing people around a cause, highlighting the importance of digital platforms in contemporary social justice movements.

Case Study 3

The Anti-CAA/NRC Protests

The protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is one of the biggest and most current social justice campaigns in India. Around the nation, several protests broke out in late 2019 and early 2020.

The Role of Social Media

Similar to the Farmer's Protest, social media played a pivotal role in mobilizing and sustaining the anti-CAA/NRC protests.

- **Information Dissemination:** Social media platforms were used to spread information about the implications of the CAA and NRC, leading to widespread public awareness.
- **Mobilization:** Platforms like Twitter and Facebook were instrumental in organizing protests, coordinating transportation, and sharing updates about the movement.
- **Global Solidarity:** The protests gained international attention through social media, leading to support from various countries and putting pressure on the Indian government.

The anti-CAA/NRC protests showcased the power of social media in galvanizing public opinion and mobilizing people against perceived injustices.

Feature	Dalit Rights Movement	Farmer's Protest	Anti-CAA/NRC Protests
Primary Issues	Caste-based discrimination, inequality	Agricultural policies, livelihoods	Citizenship rights, religious discrimination
Key Social Media Platforms	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
Main Uses of Social Media	Awareness, community building, mobilization	Information dissemination, solidarity building, protest coordination	Information sharing, mobilization, protest coordination
Challenges Faced	Online harassment, misinformation, algorithmic bias	Government censorship, internet shutdowns, misinformation	Government crackdown, internet shutdowns, misinformation

Conclusion

The intricate dance between social media algorithms and the pursuit of social justice is a complex one, marked by both immense potential and significant challenges. This research underscores the profound influence of platform dynamics on the visibility and reach of social justice issues. While these platforms have undeniably empowered marginalized voices, their algorithmic underpinnings can also perpetuate existing inequalities.

The case studies examined in this research illuminate the ways in which social media has been instrumental in mobilizing, organizing, and amplifying social movements. However, they also expose the vulnerabilities inherent in relying on platforms that prioritize profit over public interest. The specter of algorithmic bias, coupled with the capricious nature of content moderation, casts a long shadow over the potential of social media as a tool for equitable change.

To fully harness the transformative power of these platforms, a multifaceted approach is essential. This includes demanding greater transparency from platform companies, fostering media literacy among users, and advocating for policies that prioritize social welfare over corporate interests. Ultimately, the future of social justice activism hinges on our ability to

navigate the complexities of the digital landscape while upholding the core principles of equity and justice.

A concentrated effort is needed to implement regulations that prioritize social welfare, encourage algorithmic openness, and support media literacy in order to create a more egalitarian digital ecosystem. We can use social media to promote constructive social change if we comprehend the nuances of this relationship and fight for reform that lasts.

Ultimately, the future of social justice activism will depend on our ability to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by these platforms, ensuring that they are used as tools for empowerment rather than oppression.

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