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## The Role Of Media In Social Movements: A Case Study Of Contemporary Farmers' Movement In Haryana

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### Abstract

This paper examines the role of media in the contemporary farmers' movement in Haryana, India, particularly in the context of the protests against the three farm bills of Indian government. Media, in its various forms, traditional news outlets, social media, and independent news platforms, has played a pivotal role in shaping the movement's trajectory, influencing mobilization, framing issues, and impacting public opinion. Traditional media initially helped publicize the protests, though its coverage was often polarized, with some outlets framing the protests as politically motivated while others highlighted the economic grievances of farmers. Social media, on the other hand, emerged as a key tool for organizing, coordination, and creating a counter-narrative, helping to amplify the movement on a global scale. Independent media and citizen journalism also provided alternative perspectives, often challenging mainstream portrayals and giving voice to marginalized groups within the movement. This paper highlights how media, particularly digital and independent platforms, have reshaped the dynamics of modern social movements, enabling more inclusive discourse and mobilizing diverse support bases. The farmers' movement in Haryana serves as a significant case study for understanding the transformative power of media in contemporary civil resistance movements.

Keywords: Social Movement, Farmers' Movement, Social Media, Three Farm Laws

### Introduction

Social movements have always been at the heart of civil resistance, serving as crucial platforms for people to challenge the status quo, demand reforms, and seek justice. In these movements, media emerges as a powerful tool for shaping discourse, spreading awareness, and mobilizing the masses. In the digital age, the role of media in social movements has undergone a dramatic transformation, particularly with the rise of social media, which now plays a significant role in disseminating information and influencing narratives. (Loader, 2008; PTI, 2017) In recent years, media has become an indispensable tool in the organization and amplification of social movements worldwide. Whether through traditional outlets like newspapers and television or digital platforms such as social media, the influence of media on public opinion and political discourse is undeniable. The contemporary farmers' movement, which gained momentum as part of the larger protests against the Indian government's agricultural reforms, provides an insightful case study into the role media plays in shaping modern social movements.

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The farmers' movement in India, is one of the largest and most prolonged protests in recent history (Pillai et al., 2022). As the movement continued into 2021 and beyond, media outlets, ranging from traditional news platforms to social media and independent news portals, played a critical role in shaping the movement's trajectory. This article examines the role of various forms of media in the contemporary farmers' movement, focusing on their impact on mobilization, issue framing, and influencing public and policy-level discourse.

## Historical Context of Farmers' Movements in Haryana

Before analyzing the role of media, it is essential to contextualize the farmers' movement within Haryana's agrarian history. Agriculture has long been central to Haryana's economy, with more than 44% of its population depending on it for livelihood (Census, 2011). Haryana, along with Punjab, forms the backbone of India's agricultural production, particularly in wheat and rice. However, farmers in the state have faced increasing hardships due to various issues. (ICFA, n.d.)

The genesis of the contemporary farmers' protests in Haryana lies in the three agricultural reform bills passed by the Indian Parliament in September 2020. These laws—the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill—were touted by the government as essential steps toward agricultural modernization. However, farmers feared that these laws would dismantle the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system and make them vulnerable to exploitation by large corporations (Jodhaka, 2021).

## The Role of Traditional News Media in the Farmers' Movement

Traditional media, including television, radio, and print journalism, was pivotal in shaping the early public perception of the protests. In the initial stages, mainstream outlets extensively covered the protests, particularly when thousands of farmers from Haryana and Punjab marched to Delhi in November 2020. Images of massive tractor convoys and protest camps at Delhi's borders made national headlines (Singh, 2020). However, the tone and framing of the coverage varied across media outlets. Some media houses downplayed the economic grievances of the protestors, often portraying the protests as being politically motivated. Some channels focused on the inconvenience caused to urban dwellers due to road blockages and emphasized the involvement of political parties. On the other hand, some media houses specially regional outlets in Haryana provided more nuanced coverage, focusing on overall aspects of the movement including structural issues in agriculture and the long-standing demands of the farmers (Sodhi, 2024).

As the protests progressed, traditional media's portrayal became more polarized. Several large national news channels began framing the protests as disruptive and linked them to "anti-national" elements. A notable instance was the portrayal of the Republic Day tractor rally in January 2021, where clashes between protestors and the police at the Red Fort received disproportionate attention (Sodhi, 2024). Such coverage contributed to a growing divide in public opinion, particularly between rural and urban India (Sharma, 2020). Traditional media, though often critiqued, also played a significant role in shaping the narrative of the farmers' movement. While some outlets were criticized for their biased coverage, others provided balanced reporting that highlighted the farmers' grievances and the broader implications of the agricultural laws. Coverage in international outlets such as the BBC, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera brought global attention to the issue.

## The Rise of Social Media in the Farmers' Movement

### Mobilization and Coordination through Social Media

While traditional media shaped the initial narrative, social media emerged as a powerful tool for mobilization and coordination. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp became indispensable tools for protestors. Young protestors, in particular, used WhatsApp groups to organize logistics, share protest schedules, and disseminate real-time information (Bainiwal, 2022; Khosla, 2021). Social media also became a powerful counter-narrative tool. Platforms like Twitter allowed protestors to bypass the traditional media and

directly communicate with the public. Hashtags such as #FarmersProtest and #StandWithFarmers trended globally, drawing attention from international celebrities like Greta Thunberg and Rihanna, which further amplified the movement's message (Magan, 2021).

In addition to offering a platform for grassroots voices, digital media also enabled decentralized organization. With thousands of farmers participating in protests across Haryana and neighboring states, coordinating activities across such a large geographic area was a logistical challenge. Social media helped bridge this gap by allowing for quick dissemination of information regarding protest schedules, meeting points, and safety protocols. Furthermore, digital media enabled the movement to remain adaptable. When certain protest sites faced government crackdowns or restrictions on internet access, organizers and participants quickly pivoted to new platforms and communication methods, ensuring that the protests continued unabated.

## Social Media and Public Discourse

Beyond coordination, social media shaped the discourse around the protests. Academics, journalists, and influencers used these platforms to dissect the farm laws, offer policy critiques, and educate the public on the broader implications of the reforms. Twitter threads and Facebook posts explaining the farm laws in simple terms became valuable resources for those outside the agricultural community (Bainiwal, 2022). Social media also offered a platform for marginalized voices, particularly women protestors, to share their stories. Campaigns like #WomenInProtests highlighted the critical role that women played in organizing and sustaining the movement, something that mainstream media often overlooked.

## The Role of Alternative Media in the Farmers' Movement

### Independent News Portals and Citizen Journalism

Independent media outlets such as The Wire, Scroll, and The Quint offered in-depth coverage of the farmers' protests, often challenging mainstream media narratives. These platforms published investigative reports on the farm laws, provided long-form journalism on the structural issues in Indian agriculture, and gave voice to the protestors themselves. Citizen journalism also gained traction, with farmers and protestors using smartphones and social media platforms to document their experiences. This form of grassroots reporting provided an unfiltered view of the protests and helped counter the narratives of violence or political manipulation that were being promoted by some sections of the mainstream media. TrolleyTimes became a good example of such journalism (Titzmann, 2022).

Alternative media also thrived in the form of podcasts, YouTube channels, and local-language platforms. These media provided accessible content for rural audiences in Haryana, where many farmers do not speak English fluently. Local-language YouTube channels and podcasts dedicated to explaining the farm laws in Hindi, Punjabi, and Haryanvi became popular sources of information, bridging the gap between rural and urban populations.

## Media Framing and Public Opinion in Haryana

Media framing significantly impacted public opinion, with urban and rural audiences responding differently to the protests. While rural residents, particularly in Haryana, overwhelmingly supported the protestors, urban populations were more divided. Mainstream media coverage that emphasized the inconveniences caused by road blockages or framed the protests as politically motivated influenced urban perceptions, especially in cities like Delhi. Social media played a critical role in countering negative narratives and shaping a more balanced public perception. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allowed protestors and supporters to share real-time updates, personal stories, and educational content about the farm laws, thereby engaging both rural and urban audiences in a broader dialogue about agricultural reform.

## Conclusion

The contemporary farmers' movement in Haryana illustrates the complex and evolving role of media in social movements. Traditional media, particularly mainstream outlets, played a significant role in shaping the early public perception of the protests. Regional and alternative media provided more nuanced and comprehensive coverage, amplifying the voices of protestors and providing critical analysis of the farm laws. Social media emerged as a powerful tool for coordination, mobilization, and narrative-building, enabling protestors to bypass traditional media filters and directly engage with the public. As media continues to evolve, the farmers' movement in Haryana offers important insights into how digital platforms and independent journalism can reshape the dynamics of social movements and influence public and policy-level discourse.

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