# CIVIC ACTIVISM & SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF BENGALURU CITY

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**Abstract**    **Civic action is fundamental to the functioning of democracy. In recent years civic activities have gained popularity. In civic action, citizens try to solve their problems on their own instead of complaining anybody. This new era of social interaction carried through the internet has advanced the possibilities of an individual's involvement in a civic life. Social media keeps people socially engaged and helps to achieve a common goal. Bengaluru is showing concern and taking up citizen activism like never before. Bengaluru tops even when it comes to civic activism online. Bengaluru has nudged New Delhi through marking highest participation on change. org. #SaveWhitefield and #Steel flyover Beda protests launched by civic groups through social media are milestones in the history of Bengaluru's civic activism. This paper highlights the major civic activities of Bengaluru and influence of social media on it.**

**Keywords:**    **Civic activities, Bengaluru, Social media, Facebook, Twitter**

The civic action is fundamental to the functioning of democracy. Using social media for a political change is a new theory. In recent years civic activities have gained popularity. Social media gears up an army of citizen activists to shield their society.

Civic action involves collective action and brings social change through it. Social media aims at creating awareness and developing unspoken social ethics/norms of the society i.e. civic sense to make difference in the social order.

According to Michael Delli Carpini (Adler & Goggin, 2005), Civic activism an individual and collective action designed to identify an address issue of public concern. Civic activism may take in any forms like individual voluntarism, organization involvement, efforts to directly addressing an issue, work with others in a community to solve the problem, or interacting with the institutions representing democracy.

This new era of social interaction carried through the internet has advanced the possibilities of an individual's involvement in a civic life. Methods of engaging in civic activities can be in the form of signing online petition, participating in online discussions and voicing opinions to audiences, filing PIL, initiating a hashtag protest, participating in clean city drive, taking part in protests, educating others through sharing related information, bringing the issue to the notice of concerned authorities (through WhatsApp or email or FB), etc.

**Social media**

Today social media are the power of young people and it has been considered as 'force for change'. Social media works as a tool in engaging/ involving like-minded in a civic campaign. It extends their knowledge and broadens their horizon. These enrolled members have a sort of distrust towards traditional institutions and believe in the

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role of civic society for social change (Marinov & Schimmelfennig, 2015).

Since a decade, in terms of user figures and popularity of social media platforms have grown rapidly. As of the third quarter of 2017 Facebook climbed to 2.07 billion (statista.com) monthly active users while Twitter reported 330 million (statista.com) monthly active users. This rise of social media platforms have changed the scenario of social movements and promoted activism in a short span of time. Access to the internet has encouraged the growth of large digital networks of activists on the technological as well as on the economic level (Dahlgren, 2009). User friendliness and adaptability has influenced citizens and made them to express their opinion fearlessly. Today, social media play an increasingly important role in contemporary activism, with research on the Arab Spring revolutions as well as the Occupy movement showing that hundreds of thousands and sometimes even millions of people can be reached and mobilized through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube (Poell & van Dijk, 2015). Having observed the influential role that social media platforms have played in these movements and also in other events, millennial understand the capacity of social media as a tool for civic action, organization and social change (Havas Worldwide, 2011).

**Bengaluru city**

Losing its once fame as the garden city, Bengaluru is facing usual problems of megacities due to rapid growth. Inadequate town planning, inappropriate sewage system, declining underground water, improper waste management system, heavy traffic, discharge of the effluents to the rivers and encroachment of rivers, worst roads, diminishing green belt, Bengaluru faces all these issues in abundance.

According to **Carol** Upadhya,

``*India's new consumer culture have centered on the 'new middle class', in Bengaluru, this class fraction is best represented by educated professionals connected with software services, business process outsourcing and allied industries such as biotechnology (BT), as well as corporate and banking executives. Their relatively high salaries enable them to live in the large enclave apartment complexes that have sprung up across the city. The consumption style that marks off the 'new middle class' from other classes and fractions of the middle class involves not just new cultural practices such as 'eating out' or increased reliance on packaged commodities and ready-made but also car ownership—a major factor contributing to Bengaluru's ever increasing volume of traffic and air pollution"* (Upadhya, 2017).

``*These 'consuming classes' are largely responsible for the serious environmental issues plaguing the city. Interestingly this same social class has been at the forefront of diverse movements and organisations that are trying to tackle environmental issues of waste, water supply, air quality and the loss of lakes and green spaces*"( *Upadhya, 2017).*

As an effort of numerous civic groups, environmental awareness, clean city, save lakes, protect greenbelts has become a part of Bengaluru's civic culture. Though these `middle class' population is

taking initiatives to make the city as more sustainable, 'world-city' agenda (Upadhya, 2017) that is driving Bengaluru's development.

**Objectives**

This study focuses on the contribution of social media for the civic activism in the Bangalore city. It analyses various civic movement and activities which gained momentum through social media. Objectives of this study are as follows

- In order to study the role of social media in civic engagements
- To study the role of women in civic activities
- To analyze the success achieved through social media
- To study the different communication tools used by the civic activists for communication
- To study how social media differs from mainstream media

**Methodology**

Initially researcher planned to collect the primary data through an online survey. Researcher became a member of different civic groups in social media and a structured questionnaire was distributed to them using Google Forms.

Questionnaire has been prepared in Google forms and has been circulated to the respondents through email and face book messages. But only one respondent replied to the questionnaire. Despite repeated requests to fill the questionnaires and to provide with an opportunity to conduct an interview were gone in vain.

Thus researcher has collected the data which is available in the secondary sources and the same data has been used for the analysis.

**Discussion and analysis**

**Bengaluru city and civic activism**

Bengaluru is showing concern and taking up citizen activism like never before. Once the information is posted on the social networking sites of the groups, other than citizens of the affected locality, volunteers also gather and join their hand in a cause. Bengaluru tops even when it comes to civic activism online. Bengaluru has nudged New Delhi through marking highest participation on change. org (Deepika, 2016).

Few predominant civic groups in the city are Whitefield Rising, Bengaluru Political Action Committee (BPAC), Puttenahalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust , *Kasa Muktha* Bellandur, Save Bellanduru save Bengaluru, Devarabisalli Bellanduru neighbourhood, Citizens for Bengaluru, Forward Bellandur, Malleshwaram *Sutthamutta*, Malleshwaram social, Bengaluru South local, Citizens for Bengaluru, I change Indiranagar and many more.

Few major protests led by citizens in Bengaluru are,

- Protest against the proposed steel flyover between Chalukya Circle and Hebbal
- Protest against cutting down on112 trees to widen Jayamahal Road
- The demand for the implemen-tation of suburban rail in tandem with Namma Metro
- A citizens' watch committee named 'United Bengaluru' was formed to reclaim the city's lakes.
- Citizens thronged to join BBMP ward committees. When their names did not figure in the list, they filed RTIs and are contem-plating moving the court to ensure that the selection forward committees is made transparent, with more importance given to citizens.
- Citizens allege that the rules for RERA

have been framed to favor builders rather than consumers.

- The commercialisation of residen-tial areas has been opposed for almost a decade. The fight has gained new vigour with the government's new draft on Common Zoning Regulations.
- The opposition for the constru-ction of a steel bridge at Shiva nanda Circle.

Whitefield rising has been considered as Bengaluru's most influential and successful model of the civic group. Bangalorean's realized the power of citizen action group following the successful #SaveWhiteField protest launched by the Whitefield Rising. After this successful movement , White Field Rising received popularity and grown as a strongest citizen action group.

It is a platform for change makers. This group has undertaken civic activities like waste management, spot-fixing, lake cleanliness drive etc. They have a facebook page and interested can join their group and at present, their facebook page has close to 18,000 people (Mantri, 2016).

#SaveWhitefield campaign extensively promoted in social media like Facebook and WhatsApp against the bad state of infrastructure in the area. Nearly 8,000 (Nirupama, 2015) aggrieved residents and employees of companies in Whitefield, Marathahalli, Nellurahalli, Hoodi, KTPO, ITPL, Varthur village, Graphite Junction gathered in Whitefield staged a peaceful protest and formed a human chain. Their grievances were mainly on bad roads and slow pace of road works. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw of Biocan extended her support to this march through social media.

Other than this Whitefield rising residents took up save Varthur lake campaign which aimed at developing and clean the lake. The success of this group inspired various citizen movements like K R Puram Rising, Doddanekundi Rising, etc.

**#Steelflyover*beda*(No)** has lauded the civic voice in Bengaluru city. Rally against the proposed steel fly over in Bengaluru city reflected the power of Bengaluru `middle class' civilians( who were once ignored by the politicians during polls) to the politicians.

In 2016, nearly 10,000 (Chandrashekhar, 2016) citizen army gather together and protested against proposed steel flyover by the government. Proactive well-intentioned citizens spurred on by social media which has worked wonders towards rallying the masses to protect the city from the vested interests of self-serving politicians and babus.

*Beda* protestors turned to social media to garner support for their campaign from Bangalorean's. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter loaded with the steel flyover debate. Hashtags #Steelflyover*beku* (Yes), #Steelflyov erbeda created a trending on Twitter. The campaigners used the online messaging service WhatsApp to disseminate information and mobilize people for various events. Group conducted several debates with prominent citizens addressing other citizens about pros and cons of the flyover (Murali, 2016).

The Bengaluru Political Action Committee (BPAC ), headed by Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Mohandas Pai and others made a splash with their Agenda for a Better Bengaluru with a "Let's be better" call. BPAC's appeal is to the middle class, the educated voters who stay away from polls. To consolidate this

middle class 'vote bank' BPAC registered them as voters and convinced them to exercise their vote for 'good' candidates. About 4,000 participated were gathered in a 'March for Bengaluru' organized by BPAC were communicated through social and other mass media. Out of 14 candidates endorsed by BPAC, five of the candidates won (Ravichandar, 2009).

Save Bellandur Save Bengaluru, Save Bellanduru, Citizens's for Bellanduru, Forward Bellanduru, are the FaceBook groups created to save Bengalurur's largest Bellandur Lake which is struggling for its existence with waste management.

*Kasa Muktha Bellanduru* is a campaign started by Solid Waste Management Volunteers for BBMP Ward 150, Bengaluru. This started with a vision to manage 95 percent of our solid waste at ward level and to send only five percent to landfills.

I change Indiranagar a group of residents in facebook fights against the commercialization of residential areas.

Puttenahalli Lake Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust works with *Bruhath Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike* (BBMP) towards the rejuvenation and maintenance of Puttenahalli Lake. Other than save lake programmes, they are engaged in civic activism related to BBMP, file PILs, etc. Chairperson of the Trust Usha Rajgopalan says that they communicate through email, facebook and it helped them to publicize the issue.

Malleshwaram *Sutta Mutta* a group of residents near Malleshwaram are connected through the facebook page and took a new initiative of Malleshwaram night walking project to ensure safety streets during the night. According to the group admin Shridevi D N, people on streets make streets safer than CCTV, Police and Dogs during the night.

## Conclusion

The wide range of citizen campaigns is coordinated through social media in Bengaluru city. Informal institutions established through facebook and twitter is the reason behind mass protests. The success of these campaigns has set the tone for other online citizen groups. It increased the confidence of civic groups and motivated to take up it to further. It is evident from the increased civic group pages on facebook. Civic groups enhanced the optimism towards the future.

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