

ABSTRACT

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DISCOURSES OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF THE
INDIAN ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT
OF 2011.

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This dissertation explores the complex interaction of social media, print media and testimonies from participant-organizers in the context of the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement in 2011 in India. Drawing on social movement studies, Internet studies, media and cultural studies, political science, history, and postcolonial studies, I qualitatively analyze the discourses and representations of the Hazare anti-corruption movement in three primary datasets: Twitter feeds for five peak days in the movement, coverage of the movement in two pan-national English-language newspapers, the *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*, and interviews with eight participant-organizers.

My study reveals that the public discourses in mainstream Indian media on the constructions of the Hazare movement reflected the aspirations of the English-speaking middle classes in India. In articulating the significance of the movement, discourses emerging from the media stories, Twitter feeds, and movement

participants made strong references to the linkages and interpenetrations of the Indian freedom struggle and Gandhi, connecting questions of corruption to frames of nationalism and patriotism. I argue that the Hazare movement was both a product, as well as, an agent of revival of Gandhism in popular Indian imaginary. Finally, the analysis of Twitter feeds illustrate that there were four main overlapping functions of tweets: as an imagined community, providing manufactured solidarity, evoking Gandhi-Hazare comparisons, and using humor as resistance to Hazare movement narratives. Twitter influenced political discourse and served as a public space for users to articulate their ideas and opinions during the Hazare movement.

I argue that the formulation of corruption as a moral issue, a moral struggle waged by the patriotic citizenry of India, was a master discourse that linked all the other discourses of the Hazare movement. Corruption in the Hazare movement was personified by the “inefficient” political class, the “other,” “the scourge” that was getting in the way of global India’s aspirations. The global India was represented by the white-collar, professional who was showing up en masse for rallies and marches and sending tweets. And Anna Hazare was their iconic leader who harkened back to a representation of Gandhi as the moral father of Indian independence and nationhood.

This dissertation reemphasizes the centrality of representation and media in understanding political movements – without discussing media and online media any discussion of politics, history, culture, and social movements is incomplete.