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CONSTRUCTING THE DIGITAL: WORKING FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Usha Raman
University of Hyderabad

Anuja Premika
University of Hyderabad

Chinar Mehta
University of Hyderabad

Nimmi Rangaswamy
International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad

Manisha Madapathi
University of Hyderabad

Panel Abstract

The AoIR Flashpoint Symposium conducted in Hyderabad, India, explored multiple facets of digital labor–that which takes place through and on platforms, monitored or managed via digital interfaces, as well as forms of work that contribute to building, maintaining, and populating digital infrastructures. The discussions at the symposium proceeded from the recognition of the need for regulation with the consumer of technology as our main object of concern, while also attending to the humans at the center of the machinery of production–those who build the insides of the machines (coders, designers, annotators) as well as those who make the content that flows through it. This panel extends the discussions at the Symposium with five papers that attend to different types of digital/digitally-enabled work: content creation and curation, app-based services, infrastructuring through tech work, and advocacy for a just and open digital commons. Together, the papers intend to make visible how the everyday labor of those in the Global South undergirds the global network of digital goods, services, and infrastructures–both materially and discursively. We think of the digital

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economy and culture in planetary terms (Graham & Ferrari, 2022[1]), driven by technologies largely imagined in the West even as they are enabled in very specific ways by workers in the Global South. Much recent work in rapidly digitizing geographies in South Asia and Latin America has pointed to the embedded nature of the digital, as technology and as experience. Cultural creators on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Spotify speak to increasingly dispersed audiences, their content subject to a variety of regulatory regimes monitored and managed in algorithmically impenetrable ways. Gig workers find their work patterns are constrained and defined by interfaces driven by neo-colonial imaginaries that defy regulation yet prompt innovative forms of resistance. Public discourse veers between the celebratory and the cautionary, as in much of the globe, with states responding, in turn, with shut downs and penalties and sops and incentives. The papers in this panel while locating their arguments and their insights in the specific context of India, also speak to the need for imaginaries that are at once broad and contextual, that take from aspirational articulations while rejecting a universalizing logic, whether in the realm of design, or use, or regulation.

[1] Graham, M & Ferrari, F. (2022). *Digital Work in the Planetary Market.* MIT Press.

MAKING THE CASE FOR FEMWORK: LESSONS FROM STUDYING WOMEN'S "INFORMAL" LABOR[2]

Usha Raman
University of Hyderabad

The discourse on platformization in relation to women's labor force participation has been multipronged, ranging on the one hand from concerns around rising precarity and lack of social protections to the advantages to be gained from bringing structure and regulation to the informal sector. This paper brings together the findings of a 3-year project that sought to map the contours of informal work engaged with by women, both on and off platforms, and to understand whether and how the digital intervened in their everyday negotiations through work and life. Our focus was on five sectors that were characterized by high levels of informality, where women have traditionally been employed or were increasingly entering: platform-contracted personal care, ride-hailing, construction, sanitation, and home-based artisanal work.

The study sought to understand the lived experiences of women workers in these sectors, focusing on questions of access to markets, negotiations with various intermediaries (technological and human), dignity and security of work, understanding of precarity, and aspirations for the future. We also attempted to map the communicative ecologies of women in these sectors, to develop an understanding of how they used digital tools for a variety of purposes, from communication to transaction to information gathering. The project was informed by a feminist understanding of paid and unpaid labor and the nature of gender dynamics in these sectors. Drawing on 65 individual interviews (across workers, intermediaries, and activist groups) and 3 focus group discussions, in addition to group discussions with social sector organizations, conducted across three cities over a period of two years, we were able to draw out a broad picture of what informality looks and feels like from the perspectives of those who live it, and what aspirations and expectations exist among women in these spaces—particularly in relation to a rapidly digitizing landscape.

We found that across sectors, the use of networked technology was limited to the narrowly instrumental (in platform-based work) or used only for private socializing. In non-platform sectors, such as construction, sanitation, and artisanal work, most women did not have their own phones and had limited access to the phone owned (usually) by a male family member. In work that was mediated by platforms, women were often challenged by issues of algorithmic control and the opaqueness of the interface, while also deriving a sense of professional identity through this technological mediation.
The three key learnings from our research may be summarized as follows:

1. *All gig work is not platform work*: we need to go beyond the current imagination of gig work as being entirely platform mediated, with a resulting exclusion of older, more entrenched forms of "piece work" and non-contractual casual labor

[2] Raman, U. (2024, October). *Making the case for FemWork: Lessons from studying women's "informal" economy*. Paper presented as part of the panel "Constructing the digital: working from the Global South" at AoIR2024: The 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Sheffield, UK: AoIR. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.

that many women engage in, particularly in artisanal work, sanitation, and construction. At the same time, we need to understand that human intermediaries in these sectors function much like platforms, with a similar opacity that disallows negotiation by those at the bottom of the ladder.

2. *Social structures remain key to thinking about governance of gig work, both on and off platforms.* Our interviews showed that women's access to work, their ability to negotiate and form communities of practice, was largely constrained by social and cultural norms and their membership in kinship and community networks.
3. *Women must balance multiple identities and roles as they handle informal work*; in this context, work form and workplace are equally important to how they negotiate their place within a household economy. Policies that aim to offer social security to informal workers need to consider not only what women do but where they do it, as locating work within the home introduces dynamics that could be both beneficial and disempowering.

Thinking through these findings and reflecting on our conversations with women workers, we proposed a set of principles that we believe can productively inform the design of contracts, workplaces, and platform interfaces. These principles, which we call the FemWork Principles, reflect the aspirations, experiences, and lived realities of women workers at the margins, and can offer a way of thinking about the future of work. The seven ideas that form this framework encourage us to think about work and worker engagement in terms of: **F**airness, **E**quity, **M**obility-enhancing, **W**orker-identity focused, offering **O**pportunity for meaningful organization, is **R**espect-based, and **K**nowledge-based. We offer these principles as a framework for thinking about women, work, and informality, recognizing that contexts vary widely across geography and sector, and depending on the mediation of technology or platforms. We see these principles as an expansive and adaptable set of standards that can be applied by advocates for the rights of all marginalized workers in informal work across sectors, as well as those working on platform design and governance. While we build our model by situating women worker's voices and experiences at the center for sustainable change, we make the case that these insights and reforms are relatable to and transferable for the benefit of other marginalized groups. FemWork is a framework that extends the idea of fair and just work by drawing on feminist values, which are then articulated as a set of discrete worker rights that can be applied across work contexts. FemWork is about recognizing that the well-being of workers must be centered, rather than the productivity or profitability of work. The FemWork values operate in tandem with each other.

Even as the government and policymakers focus on the promise of technology-mediated platforms to address many of the precarities of informality, our research suggests that it is not informality that is the problem, but the absence of social and civic protections that could give women the choice to take on work in a way that is accorded dignity and an acknowledgment of their status as productive labor.

CONVERGING LABORS: CREATING THE NEW BEAUTY MEDIA ECOLOGY IN ONLINE SPACES[3]

Anuja Premika
University of Hyderabad

Online spaces have formed a home for beauty culture since the early days of the user generated web (Hund, 2023), and have now arguably taken over traditional media as the primary mode of beauty communication (The Digital Beauty Counter, 2018). Taking the form of photos, videos, and text, primarily on social media platforms, but also on websites and blogs, beauty media[4] today is created by a range of individual and institutional actors—from journalists, editors, and influencers, to brands, websites, and magazines. The distinctions between individual and institutional media however, are hard to define—brands for instance, frequently repost user generated content on their social media platforms, and magazines rarely hire staff writers anymore, but rely on freelancers and independent contractors to populate their (web)pages and social media feeds. Further, the differences between individual actors are similarly hard to define. While they self-identify in distinct ways—referring to themselves as influencers, creators, makeup artists, journalists, freelancers, or consultants—their labors often overlap and morph into one another, as they carry out the forms of work that have increasingly become the inescapable norm in beauty media today. Based on interviews conducted with these individual actors, as well as representatives of the industry such as public relations personnel, brand managers, and influencer relationship managers, I explore this phenomenon of converging labors.

Influencers and content creators engage in "productive, purposeful, task-oriented, and value-generating" labors (Duffy, 2022) and Duffy suggests that these practices are "quite similar to the (waged) work of traditional media producers, including journalists, video producers, advertisers, and publicists" (p. 8). As such, content creators have, "come to resemble the traditional media workers … they have defined themselves against" (p. xii). Concurrently, influencers' practices of self-branding and -promotion have expanded to become the norm in several other fields, in a phenomenon that Bishop calls "influencer creep" (2023): "influencers have developed and formalized strategies for garnering visibility on social media platforms, which are taken up by … workers more broadly" (para. 3). I explore how this phenomenon—where influencers increasingly carry out the labors of traditional media workers, and workers in other culture industries adopt the practices and grammars of influencer culture—plays out in beauty media, and how the histories of labor in and inherent tensions within beauty media further complicate this trend.

[3] Suggested Citation (APA): Premika, A. (2024, October). *Converging labors: Creating the new beauty media ecology in online spaces*. Paper presented as part of the panel "Constructing the digital: working from the Global South" at AoIR2024: The 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Sheffield, UK: AoIR. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.
[4] In this paper, I use beauty media to refer both to magazine and website content published by institutional titles, as well as social media content created by institutional and individual creators.

The converging labors in this space can be observed along three dimensions—the mandate to create “good content,” the competition to stand out in a crowded content space, and the relationship building that these are contingent on. My interviewees shared that “good content” is that which is “authentic,” but those with backgrounds in traditional media understood this as being expert-backed and fact-checked, whereas influencers saw authenticity as being about their own identity or experience. This centering of identity was not unique to influencers, however—increasingly faced by the mandate to develop their personal platforms on social media and take on paid partnerships with brands (for some out of interest, others because opportunities in traditional media were drying up, or simply out of the fear of being left behind), the journalists too had to build “authentic” identities online. But here too, they understood authenticity as being about credibility—their Instagram bios featured the names of publications they have contributed to, and they frequently shared clippings of their magazine or website articles alongside content they created for social media, establishing that they were trained in the “print tradition.” The influencers too recognized that they needed to “do the research” before putting out information, with one influencer indicating that they could take days to weeks to read up on a product or ingredient before deciding whether to feature it.

Both influencers and journalists indicated that they aimed to differentiate themselves in the crowded beauty space by creating authentic content, rather than simply following trends. However, they recognized that this was sometimes at odds with the competing demands of brands and platforms. Brands often only cared for hard numbers (in terms of likes, shares, click-throughs, and sales), and platforms heavily favored content with the potential for virality (for instance, algorithmically encouraging the use of viral audios or reel templates). Neither brands nor platforms prioritized accuracy, and both journalists and influencers expressed their frustration with creators who put out false, incomplete, or misleading information in the interest of “being first,” jumping on a trend, or pandering to the industry.

Beauty media, however, has never been without its commercial entanglements—journalists working within traditional beauty media outlets such as magazines have always looked to maintain long-standing relationships with beauty brands, receiving free products and invites to trips and events. This relationship, however, was thought of as the magazine’s relationship with the brand, whereas now, increasingly the labor of building and maintaining them are the job of the individual journalists. Some journalists shared how they had to reestablish their connections after they transitioned from working as staff writers with magazines to a freelance working model. Nonetheless, journalists had their foot in the door of the industry, and influencers expressed struggling to build these relationships from scratch, performing aspirational labor (Duffy, 2022) and conspicuous consumption (see Marwick, 2015) in hopes that brands would want to work with them in the future. While journalists could sometime subsidize this unpaid labor through their paid work for traditional media, and even repurposed work put into traditional media content to generate social media content (for instance, converting a magazine story into an Instagram reel for their personal page), influencers had to carry out this labor with no way to immediately monetize or otherwise generate income from it.

Journalists and influencers carried out similar tasks—researching products, testing them out, creating technically well-produced content, staying on top of trends, and trying to stand out. Journalists however resisted being referred to as influencers—they insisted that their social media activities were an extension of their journalistic work, and were unhappy that they were forced to share space—digital as well as physical, at industry events, for instance—with influencers who had not "put in the work." As this paper demonstrates, however, "the work" increasingly looks the same for both journalists and influencers. They are often faced with the same industry and platform mandates, and experience similar kinds of precarity in their labor. Beyond "influencer creep," where the self-branding practices of influencers online are adopted in other areas of work, beauty media demonstrates how the inherent tensions of the space—its commercial logic and the inalienability of media-industry relationships—has given rise to new hierarchies (imaginations around good, or even deserving, creators), as well as a flattening of old ones (the gatekeeping associated with legacy print publications, see Abram and Fong, 2020). This work informs broader conversations around the nebulous nature of influence (Pearl, 2024), and how we may understand (and as a next step, regulate) the labors of social media creators (see Abidin et al., 2023).

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SOLVING FOR "BAD WORKERS": HOW DATA IMAGINARIES NORMALIZE SURVEILLANCE OF SANITATION WORKERS IN INDIA[5]

Chinar Mehta
University of Hyderabad

In Chandigarh, sanitation workers click selfies through smartwatches on their wrists as they arrive early in the morning. These pictures appear in a remote-control room miles away, where officers track the live location of each worker on the computers. As the day progresses, the watches track if the workers are within their area of geographic jurisdiction. If data from a watch shows the worker moving outside their work area, they are marked absent for that time, and their wages are cut.

This scene repeats across a dozen cities in India where sanitation workers are required to wear watches equipped with GPS to monitor their movement remotely from centralized control rooms by their supervisors. In this context, the deployment of surveillance technologies is shaping and extending a casteist culture of suspicion over low-income sanitation workers hailing from marginalized castes. Remote technologies that make use of internet infrastructures are constantly put to use to quantify the productivity of workers to police and control them. Through various ways, widespread consent and acceptance is manufactured for such surveillance technologies. This paper's central question is: How do socio-technical imaginaries of caste, labor, and datafication in public discourse normalize and justify surveillance measures on sanitation workers? We use discourse analysis to examine how the state imagines and legitimizes surveillance technologies in sanitation work and how a socio-technical landscape of "efficiency" and "innovation" is inflected by relations of caste and labor. Drawing on government documents, marketing materials, news reports, and interviews with journalists, we make the argument that imaginaries of techno-solutionism and caste-based suspicions come together to make surveillance acceptable.

Local governments are encouraged to adopt technologies to ensure "transparency" of public services as part of national government programs like Digital India and Clean India Mission. This pursuit for transparency relies on socio-technical imaginaries in public discourse to justify the use of invasive and unjust surveillance of workers. Socio-technical imaginaries are imagined futures that consolidate certain realities over others through the exercise of power (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015; McNeil et al., 2017). This analytical device rooted in science and technology studies no doubt finds a place in media studies as language becomes crucial in how technoscientific visions are enacted in the world (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021). Additionally, "surveillance capitalism" holds significant implications for "information civilization" in that surveillance itself is dependent on an architecture of data-collection for behavioral prediction that challenges democratic norms (Zuboff, 2015). Uncovering socio-technical imaginaries that benefit surveillance practices points to the future of data infrastructure.

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[5] Mehta, C. (2024, October). *Solving For "Bad Workers": How Data Imaginaries Normalize Surveillance Of Sanitation Workers In India*. Paper presented as part of the panel "Constructing the digital: working from the Global South" at AoIR2024: The 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Sheffield, UK: AoIR. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.

Our central argument in the paper concerns how imaginaries about workers and technologies generate widespread complacency and acceptance of surveillance on workers. We divide this argument into three themes. Firstly, due to the relationship between caste and sanitation work, workers are seen as people who are meant to do the work of cleaning. This leads to a lack of rights in sanitation work, interlocking the relationship between caste and division of labor and laborers in data imaginaries. Secondly, the workers are imagined to be "bad workers" avoiding work and therefore believed to be paying through their right to privacy being revoked. Most sanitation workers belong to Scheduled Castes, occupying a lower status in the caste hierarchy in Indian society, and are associated with the "polluted" work of cleaning (Cassan et al., 2022; Raghuram, 2001). Scholars studying technologies used in carceral and forensic studies write of "technologies of suspicion" through which empirical processes are codified to produce and interpret results in a way that makes possible supervision, some kind of deterrence, and eventually control (Campbell, 2002; Shelby, 2023). Finally, technological innovation is understood to be an infallible solution to keep track of the workers' whereabouts. Critical scholarly work in studying the imaginations of smart cities rightly points to the ideology of innovation that turns complex sociocultural and political issues into quick-fix techno-solutions (Godin & Vinck, 2017; Mertia, 2017; Morozov, 2013; Sadowski & Bendor, 2019). Realizing a kind of "data imperative" (Sadowski, 2019), local governments and private tech firms see workers as datafied bodies that can be disciplined.

This case of surveillance exemplifies datafication as contingent articulation; collecting (and acting on) data is the answer before the problem is fully understood. Our analysis reveals a techno-optimistic vision that innovates at the cost of autonomy and dignity of frontline workers. Ultimately, we argue that surveillance mechanisms enacted on low-income workers are state-sanctioned casteist aggressions that ride on widespread public consent.

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CONSTRUCTING THE LABOR DIGITAL: DATAFICATION OF AND IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH[6]

Nimmi Rangaswamy
International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad

We explore the forms and structures of digital labor, examining the precarity and consolidation of working conditions driven by the platform economy in urban India. We consider the threats in 'gigging' and the informalization of labor (Hussain et al. 2023), the need to reconceptualize worker well-being, risks, and stress, and the alignment of workplaces and workers in digital labor. We also acknowledge the contradictions in viewing platform work in India as both marginalizing and as a means of consolidating employability for labor in the informal sector. Despite the absence of a formal employment sector capable of employing millions, digital and platform labor, however precarious, provides a sense of regularity and continuity of work. By examining the informal sector's everyday work practices, contexts, and conditions, we highlight the narratives of labor journeys and the uncertainty amidst opportunities for work in the digital labor landscape. Inspired by James C. Scott's 'Weapons of the Weak (1985), our study highlights the vexed duality of 'gig' labor, which can both reward and punish, in the context of India and developing countries. Despite the 'illusion of choice' and 'algorithmic despotism' (Griesbach et al. 2019) displayed by digital platforms, workers recognize the opportunities available. Many believe the work flexibility and potential earnings are unmatched compared to the nature of employment in the vast and unskilled informal sector in India.

Underpinning the theme of moving 'beyond data universalism,' our study sheds light on the everyday aspects of data power concerning location, space, and time. Focusing on 'agency,' one of the tenets in the theory of 'datafication of and in the Souths' (Milan & Treré 2019), we aim to disentangle the idea of 'performance' as a socio-technical derivative governing digital labor in urban India and what we address as 'unfair usage of data power' by technology platforms. The global South is contextualized as economically constrained, resource-deficient, and socially hierarchical in contrast to the North. Although platform-mediated work has faced criticism for its precariousness and adverse effects in the Global North, its reception and impact in the Global South offer contrasting narratives. Flexibility, accessibility, and transparent income generation associated with platform labor have allowed individuals from diverse and precarious socio-economic backgrounds to earn and enhance their livelihoods. Without diminishing the information asymmetry, algorithmic tyranny, and performance pressure challenges on digital labor, our study offers an ethnographic view of everyday opportunities, however small, to counter the 'despotism' of platform work. The Global South is characterized by a preponderance of informal labor markets and unregulated, often unsecured, employment. However, platform-mediated work has also been understood as formalizing work by introducing transparency and standardization of wages

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[6] Rangaswamy, N. (2024, October). *Constructing the labor digital: Datafication of and in the global south*. Paper presented as part of the panel “Constructing the digital: working from the Global South” at AoIR2024: The 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Sheffield, UK: AoIR. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.

(Sehrawat 2021). Previous research studies have highlighted the role of digital platforms in providing employment opportunities to marginalized populations, including those without formal education or limited access to traditional job markets, and the trend of marginalized groups and religious minorities entering platform work. The heterogeneity of the platform workforce remains unexplored due to the global North-centricity of these narratives and the dominance of ride-hailing platforms.

Central to the critique of platform-mediated labor is the idea of 'algorithmic management,' aligned with the deepening subjugation of the platform-mediated labor experience. This shift in perception, especially research from the global North, understands digital platforms as primarily perpetuating precarious work conditions. An important dimension of our study revolves around using data from digital platforms to optimize and prioritize demand, supply, and business expansion over employment issues. Digital platforms capture and deploy data to manipulate and optimize business metrics over worker experience and comfort. We suggest an emerging gamification culture between digital labor and the digital platform. In a gradual yet consistent way, digital workers adapt to stringent algorithmic management and precarious working conditions, finding means to overcome some of its repercussions on everyday work practices. We develop the notion of 'agency' to disentangle the idea of 'gamification by agents' as a socio-technical derivative governing digital workers in urban India. Digital platforms, in their hunt for efficiency and profitability, often employ gamification tactics to manipulate their workforce's labor. However, in this dynamic ecosystem, workers are not passive agents. Instead, they engage in a reciprocal gamification process, seeking to reclaim agency and subvert the platforms' control. By adopting a two-fold perspective, we explore mechanisms through which platforms manipulate labor while investigating worker strategies to extract agency and exploit platform work mandates. We explore this dualistic relationship, as remarkably exhibited in urban India, where rapid urbanization and technological advancement have reshaped the fabric of digital labor and commerce.

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COMMUNICATIVE LABOR IN THE TIMES OF INTERNET SHUTDOWNS[7]

Manisha Madapathi
University of Hyderabad

Citizen protests have historically played a crucial role in shaping policy by bringing attention to pressing issues and exerting pressure on policymakers. For instance, following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in March, 2011, Japan witnessed widespread protests from anti-nuclear groups, women groups, and citizens who called for the government to abandon nuclear energy. While short lived, the protests led to a dramatic change in the county's energy policy, to become nuclear-free, until former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was re-elected in 2012. (Williams, 2012) In 1986, People Power Revolution, also known as the EDSA revolution in the Philippines was a nonviolent civil resistance by the citizens, including students, and religious groups, against President Ferdinand Marcos' regime of violence and electoral fraud. In four days, Marcos was ousted to make way for democratic reforms. (McGeown, 2011) The often-cited Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America in the 20th century, also used various forms of civil disobedience to bring attention to legalized racial segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement of African Americans. This movement not only led to the striking down of the laws that allowed legal discrimination, but also achieved the passage of significant federal legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. It is important to note that each of these movements faced coercive responses from the state in each instance, including police crackdowns and military interventions as well as ideological control through censorship of critical media outlets, restricted access to information, and limiting media coverage.

In India too, there have been several protest movements that have contributed to changing the course of national governance and policy. In 2011, the anti-corruption movement took off under the leadership of activist Anna Hazare, and several political figures to alleviate corruption and kleptocracy in the country. The movement led to the passing of the Lokpal and Lokayukta Bill in 2013, making it an Act that "seeks to provide for the establishment of the institution of Lokpal to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain important public functionaries including the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, members of parliament, Group A officials of the Central Government and for matters connecting them". (IANS, 2013) Similarly, in 2012, the incident of a gang rape and fatal assault of a woman in Delhi sparked widespread outrage and led to massive protests demanding stronger laws and measures to address gender-based violence and ensure the safety of women. The protests prompted the government to enact the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, which introduced harsher penalties for sexual offences, expanded the definition of rape, and enhanced provisions for the protection of women's rights. ("President signs ordinance", 2013)

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In this paper, I look at one such movement in the recent past that led to change in government policy was the Farmers' Protest that lasted from September 2020 to November 2021 which led to the repealing of the three controversial farm laws. ("It's official. Three," 2021) The protestors, who were mainly farmers, held a sit-in protest at the bordering villages of the national capital, Delhi at Singhu, Tikri, and Gazipur, for over a year. This civic dissent by the farmers was interrupted by the state at various points, sometimes coercively, through the use of water cannons, tear gas, and barricades; and some other times by disrupting or suspending information infrastructure, through internet shutdowns, and network throttling. ("Protesting farmers brave", 2020)

Under these conditions, citizens and journalists found ways to circumvent restrictions to convey their dissent. In this paper I describe and analyze the various ways in which these shutdowns were bypassed and how that adds to the labor of communication during an internet shutdown.

Methodology

In order to research an event-based phenomenon, it is useful to adapt Clarke's (2003) situational analyses approach to lay out the several actors and actants involved in the event and then find analytical and relational categories from the coded data. Clarke (2003) takes grounded theory literature and renovates, regenerates, and re-articulates it to lay emphasis on its postmodern capacities. Abandoning over arching paradigms, and theoretical and methodological meta systems, grounded theory approach allows for the specific, local, heterogenous and relational to emerge from the data itself. Situational analyses can be made through drawing three kinds of maps. First, situational maps which lay out the major human, non-human, discursive and other major elements in the research situation of concern and provoke analyses of relations among them. Second, the social worlds/ arenas maps that engage in ongoing negotiations of the various collective actors involved, where meso level interpretations can be made of its social organizational and institutional and discursive dimensions. And finally, positional maps which lay out the major positions taken, and not taken (silences) by actors. Using these maps to interpret data encourage making connections previously ignored or not seen while also acknowledging disparities, contradictions, and gaps.

For the purpose of this paper, I emphasize on the situational maps aspect of the situational analysis method. I map out the various actors involved in the situation of a protest that has faced communication blackout at various levels throughout the duration of the protest. In this paper, I will be using in-depth interviews of protestors, journalists, and internet advocacy groups to understand how internet shutdowns played out during the Farmers Protest. The protest started in late 2020, and went on till the controversial farm laws were repealed in November 2021. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. At the time of the interviews, the protest had just been called off and protesters had vacated the site. All interviews were conducted online, on Zoom in 2022, between February and August.

In this paper I draw on interviews with protestors (2), journalists (3), and civil society activists (2) who have engaged with the protest to understand how the movement

negotiated through the periods of communication disruption. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity. In the following sections, I unpack the various themes that emerged in these discussions and lay out the strategies and techniques used to manage communications and sustain the movement over the duration of the protest. I use these findings to extrapolate the communicative labor that protestors and journalists performed even under severe crackdown.

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