Framing for mobilization

Content analysis of the Farmers protest's social media commentary

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Abstract

This study examines collective action frames visible in the social media

commentary of the ongoing Farmers' protest in India. It addresses the theoretical

and critical questions about social media's role in the 21st century social

movements as well as how framing contributes to mobilization and overcoming

the collective action problem. Previous studies have advocated both for and

against using social media as a tool to encourage collective action as well as

underscored the importance of framing in mobilization. In this thesis, these

theoretical arguments are combined and social media's applicability for discussing

collective action frames is analysed. The content analysis of 1400 comments on

the Kisan Ekta Morcha's Facebook page indicates that social media sites can offer

opportunities for the general public to engage themselves in the mobilization task

of social movements through framing of societal issues. These findings are

especially promising for contexts where the mainstream media and/or government

is known to advocate against dissident ideas.

Keywords: India; Social movements; Mobilization; Framing; Social media

Words: 9,998

2

Table of contents

1.	Intro	duction	4				
	1.1.	Research case and aims	5				
	1.2.	Relevance	7				
2.	Background						
	2.1.	Why are the farmers protesting the farm bills	8				
	2.2.	Kisan Ekta Morcha's role in the movement	9				
3.	Liter	ature Review	9				
4.	Theo	retical Framework	10				
	4.1.	Connecting social media, collective action, and framing	10				
	4.2.	Collective action frames	12				
5.	Meth	odology	13				
	5.1.	Research design	13				
	5.2.	Data collection and sample	14				
	5.3.	Ethical considerations	15				
	5.4.	Data cleaning and coding					
	5.5.	Analysis	17				
6.	Findi	ngs	18				
	6.1.	Quantitative findings	18				
	6.2.	Qualitative findings	25				
		6.2.1. Diagnostic frames	25				
		6.2.2. Prognostic frames	28				
		6.2.3. Motivational frames	30				
7.	Conc	lusion	32				
8.	Refe	rences	34				
9.	Appe	ndices					
	9.1.	Appendix 1 - Selected posts	39				
	9.2.	Appendix 2 - Frequency of the frames	39				
	9.3.	Appendix 3 - Frequency of the subframes	40				

1. Introduction

On November 25th, 2020, tens of thousands of Indian farmers, mainly from the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, marched to the nation's capital in a protest against the new agricultural bills passed by the government in September 2020. Already in September, when the laws were first introduced, farmer unions held local protests, but after two months it was decided that more drastic measures were needed, and thus the movement of Dilli Chalo (transl. Let's go to Delhi), was born and both the farmers and the protest moved to Delhi (Perrigo, 2020). Since then, the protesters have continued to stay in the outskirts of the capital city with demands that the government must withdraw the farm bills as well as guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for their crops (Bhalla, 2021).

Many of the protesters have been disappointed with the way the movement and the farm bills have been portrayed in the mainstream media as well as how the government has disrupted the protest's dissemination of information (Chabba, 2021; Chettri, 2020; Sircar, 2020). At times, the mobile internet services at the protest sites have been shut down (Human rights watch, 2021) and Twitter accounts associated with the protest suspended (BBC, 2021). In addition, some of the journalists reporting about the protest have faced criminal charges (Human rights watch, 2021). This indicates that the Indian government is committed in their efforts of constructing their preferred narrative about the farm bills and the protest. As a countermeasure, the farmers began broadcasting their own side of the events on print and social media with the aim of sharing information that could help people to better understand their side of the argument and mobilize individuals for their cause (Chabba, 2021; Chettri, 2020).

Mobilization, defined in this paper as the convergence and activation of actors for an interim unit that has a shared common cause, purpose, and identity (Haug, 2013; Melucci, 1996; Gerbaudo, 2012), has shown to be a complex process where it takes a lot of time and resources to motivate individuals to take collective action (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015). One obstacle that social movements often face is the free-rider problem where "rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests" (Olson, 1965: 2). The rationale behind this is that if the movement is successful, the benefits can be enjoyed by everyone regardless of whether they participated or not, and conversely, if the movement is not successful, any contributions to the movement would have been purposeless (Runge, 1984; Goodwin & Jasper, 2015). This leads

to a collective action problem, where it is difficult for social movements to convince individuals to partake in them since it's not ever in their rational interest to do so (Olson, 1965; Runge, 1984).

It has been argued that social media could help with overcoming this collective action problem as well as make mobilization faster, cheaper, and freer of government control (Mosca & della Porta, 2013; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Juris, 2005). Tufekci (2014) for example notes that in modern protests the free-rider problem becomes less relevant since individuals are attracted to participate by "the engaged, powerful effervescence the protests create" on social media (Tufekci, 2014: 207).

Framing, defined as the conscious and strategic effort by individuals or groups to get others to perceive events from their preferred point of view, has been argued to be an important factor in a successful mobilization (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Benford & Snow, 2000). It has been theorized to help with overcoming the collective action problem by producing powerful enough meaning and significance, capable of convincing individuals that partaking in the movement is actually in their best interest (Benford & Snow, 2000). To this point, the movement's issues must be 'framed' in a way that resonates with the beliefs and emotions of potential participants (Goodwin & Jasper, 2015).

Social media has opened up political communication to the general public and as a result, framing societal or political issues is increasingly in the hands of the regular people rather than only with activists, journalists, or politicians (Goh & Pang, 2016). With this thesis, the aim is to investigate how this dynamic of the general public being able to frame societal issues is visible in the social media commentary of the Farmers' protest and how these individuals' framing connects to overcoming the collective action problem.

1.1 Research case and aims

This thesis examines the strategies and frames employed by social media commentators in their efforts to protest against the government's new farm laws and promote the Farmers' protest. It researches the dynamics of collective action frames found on Facebook and discusses their possible implications for the movement. Combining both qualitative and quantitative content

analysis, this study focuses on examining the comments left on Kisan Ekta Mocha's¹ Facebook page in order to better understand the general public's views and framings of the farm bills and the movement. The overarching aim of this research is to examine and discuss how collective action framing on social media connects to mobilization in the context of the Farmers' protest. The following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What kind of collective action frames do the social media commentators employ when partaking in the Farmers's protest?

RQ2: Are there any changes to the dynamics of using the frames?

The exploratory nature of the first question allows the examination of what kind of topics and arguments are brought up in the Facebook commentary of the movement, and what kind of frames people employ in these discussions. With the second question's longitudinal approach it is possible to examine if some frames are more popular at specific times and note the online commentators' possible changes in arguments as the movement progresses.

The comments on Kisan Ekta Morcha's Facebook page were selected as the case study for the following reasons. Firstly, when looking at the social media usage of India, Facebook is the most popular of all the social media platforms with 320 million users as of January 2021 (Statista, 2021). The large number of users transferred to a large amount of research material. As the Facebook page of Kisan Ekta Morcha, compared to their other social media sites², had the most followers and comments, it was assumed that gathering arguments from different perspectives would be easier on Facebook. Finally, social sciences in general have favoured Twitter over Facebook in their studies (Gerbaudo, 2016). Therefore, focusing on Facebook contributes to a lesser known area of research.

Kisan Ekta Morcha has been active on multiple social media sites since mid-December 2020 and gained a following of hundreds of thousands across the different platforms, with the Facebook page having over 500,000 followers as of May, 2021 (Kisan Ekta Morcha, n.d). The

¹ A farmer-led collective actively promoting and discussing the Farmers' protest on social media

² Kisan Ekta Morcha is active on Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, and Snapchat in addition to Facebook

group uses social media as a platform to share information and arguments about the protest (Chettri, 2020; Sircar, 2020). The decision to focus on Kisan Ekta Morcha is based on the fact that they are the biggest movement actor on social media in terms of the quantity of posts and the levels of engagement³ they have been able to generate from the public.

By focusing on the comments, rather than the posts themselves, the aim is to gain a more varied set of information, also leaving room for those who oppose the movement. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to examine the new dynamic where individuals from the general public now have the possibility to engage themselves in the framing of the movement. As the actual posts on Kisan Ekta Morcha's page only contain information from the page administrators, focusing on the comments enables analysing the information from the general public.

1.2 Relevance

In the last decade a clear upward trend of using social media as a political tool can be observed (Schroeder, 2018). In the political public arena it is now almost expected of politicians, media corporations and ongoing social movements to have a presence on social media. Additionally, the general public are no longer only passive consumers of media but rather active participants in both creating and disseminating information (Tufekci, 2017). Because of this rapidly changed dynamic, there is a need for more theoretical as well as empirical research to better understand social media's role in politics.

It can also be observed that the number of global protests has grown over the past few decades (Strochlic, 2021, Brannen et al., 2020). Brannen et al. (2020) for example found that global mass protests increased annually by an average of 11.5 percent between 2009 and 2019, with protests concentrating increasingly in the Middle Eastern and African countries. They additionally argue that this upward trend is likely to continue in the future (Brannen et al., 2020). While social movements have been studied extensively in academia, there are indications that they are becoming ever more prevalent in politics around the world. Therefore additional research focusing on 21st century social movements is valuable, especially in the context of

 $^{^{\}rm 3}$ Engagement here is understood as the amounts of followers, likes, shares and comments

developing countries where the amount of protests as well as usage of social media is predicted to increase the most (Brannen et al., 2020; Poushter, 2018).

2. Background

2.1 Why are the farmers protesting the farm bills

For decades, the Indian government has shielded farmers from free markets by offering subsidies, exemptions of income taxes, crop insurances and by strongly regulating how sales of agricultural products can happen (Biswas, 2020). With the new laws the government has decided to roll back some of these policies, and adopt a more market-driven economic model (ibid.). The new laws would allow farmers and traders to conduct their business outside of the government-run whole-sale markets 'mandis' that have been a fixture in India's agriculture sector since the Green revolution (Frayer, 2021). The government's intention is to lessen the regulatory interference, and thus allow private investment into India's farm sector (Gupta & Ganguly, 2020). Another big part of the protests is the issue of guaranteed a Minimum Support Price, or MSP, for selected crops (Dutta, 2020). Even when the MSP has only been said to benefit 6% of the farmers nationally, in states focusing on growing crops that have this guaranteed minimum support price (for example rice and wheat), it can offer great benefits. This is the case for example for Punjab and Haryana, and therefore farmers from these states have most vocally opposed the new laws (ibid.).

The farmers' fear is that free markets and rising corporate power is going to result in loss of land and livelihood since the smallholder farmers could no longer compete against the bigger corporate actors (Gupta & Ganguly, 2020). They also fear that the new laws are going to dismantle the MSP system, since traders are no longer required to do their business at the official mandis where the MSP is in effect (Dutta, 2020). These concerns and fears for their future are the reason why so many of the farmers have joined the movement.

2.2 Kisan Ekta Morcha's role in the movement

On Monday, 14 December 2020, at one of the protest sites an announcement of "Those who know how to operate Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat please come forward and contact us" was made (Sircar, 2020). Couple hours before, the leaders of the farmer unions were trying to come up with possible ways to tackle some of the narratives visible on mainstream and social media that discredited the protest and framed the protestors as anti-nationalists and violent. From this discussion and with the help of the announcement, the movement's own IT cell, Kisan Ekta Morcha, was born (ibid.). The main task of this IT cell is to reach out to masses, put forward the farmers' points of view and counter misinformation. They use Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat to cast messages, photos and videos from the protest sites to the wider public (ibid.).

The organizers of this IT cell argue that they have a vital role in the movement, countering the government's narratives. The aim of Kisan Ekta Morcha is additionally to combine all of the vital information into one place and give interested individuals the possibility to follow the events daily. The organizers have highlighted the importance of protestors themselves leading this IT cell, since this diminishes the possibility of outside pressure affecting the reporting (ibid).

3. Literature review

Social media's role in social movements has enjoyed growing academic interest in the last decade (Freelon et al., 2018; Tufekci, 2017). Perhaps most famously brought up by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions during the Arab Spring, there have been examples of social media positively contributing to social movements' mobilization and organization efforts (Tufekci, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2012). While there have been several studies researching either the connection between mobilization and social media, framing and social media, or mobilization and framing, only a couple of previous examples can be found where all of these combined in the same empirical study.

Goh and Pang (2016) have researched how different collective action frames were used during the 2013-2014 Singaporean protests' social media discussion and how this impacted both

the mobilization and waning of the movement. Their study found that in environments where the mainstream media discusses the government in positive light, such as Singapore, social media gave the general public the ability to "define their own frames on issues that are contentious and critical of the government" (Goh & Pang, 2016: 231). Their research also shows that while the frames employed on social media seemed to positively contribute to the movement's mobilization power in the beginning of the movement, they weren't enough to keep it going on for a prolonged period (Goh & Pang, 2016).

Another similar study researches how the land expropriation by the Chinese government was framed on the online forums and blogs as well as in the news media (Pu & Scanlan, 2012). The paper found that positive framing in the media is an essential and valuable tool against authorities. Their study also demonstrates how collective action frames and internet based media can be powerful tools in mobilizing people for a shared cause (Pu & Scanlan, 2012).

While these studies are using some of the same methods and arguments as this thesis, several differences can also be identified. The main difference with Pu and Scalan's paper is the fact that their paper only includes qualitative analysis, while this paper additionally discusses the quantitative findings. Also, both of the papers have several different empirical sources (multiple Facebook sites, blogs, and news media sites), while this paper offers a more in-depth analysis of one specific site. Finally, the geographical locations and motivations of each social movement that these studies discuss are totally different. All of these factors considered, it can be concluded that this thesis is the first study to research both qualitatively and quantitatively the usage of collective action frames on social media in the Indian context.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Connecting social media, collective action, and framing

Previous research on media and social movements has found that it's typical for mainstream media to either ignore social movements or discuss them and the protestors in a negative light (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012; Stein, 2009; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). Social media has therefore risen to be a popular tool of activists to organize and mobilize masses. The promotion of movements through social media doesn't depend on mainstream media's attention and keeps the

organizers themselves in control of the narrative (Castells, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). In less democratic environments, social media has been theorized to be an even more valuable tool for activists as the anonymity and non-political nature of the platforms can help avoid governments' control on dissident ideas (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Fahmi, 2009).

In researching social movements' emergence and development, scholars have recognized framing as a key factor of collective action (McAdam and Scott, 2005). The framing theory asserts that movement actors have a significant role in framing social issues in a way that can "mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford 1988: 198). Benford & Snow argue that the movement organizers, media, and politicians are engaged in what Hall has called "the politics of signification" where different actors aim to gain the power of signifying events and the movement in a particular way (Hall, 1982: 64-65; Benford & Snow, 2000). This 'power' is significant since successful framing can result in a shared understanding among individuals of some state of affairs in their lives. If this shared understanding is that of injustice, it can encourage people to take collective action to fix the perceived issue (Benford & Snow, 2000; Ward and Ostrom, 2006). The former arguments show how framing has been thought to contribute towards solving the collective action and free-rider problem that were discussed in the introduction. In regards to social media, it has been argued that since information in general spreads faster and wider on social media platforms, the frames employed while using social media can do the same. Because of this, social media as a carrier of powerful frames, could offer great possibilities for more effective mobilization (Goh & Pang, 2016).

Traditionally it has been argued that framing within social movements involves conscious and strategic decisions that are made mainly by the social movement organizations (McAdam and Scott, 2005; Snow and Benford, 1988). While this kind of strategic framing requires precision and consistency from the formal organizations, Bimber et al. (2005) have pointed out that for contemporary social movements the situation can be different. They note that 21st century social movements don't necessarily leave all of the mobilization and organization tasks for the traditional movement organizations. Rather, today's social movements are less centralized and composed of individuals with diverse viewpoints and ideas on how to mobilize others and build the wanted narratives (Bennett et al., 2008; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). With the increased access to the internet and social media, these ideas can now be publicly shared and discussed. As

such, the framing of the movement, and therefore also part of the mobilization task, can nowadays be increasingly in the hands of individuals engaged in online discussions (Goh & Pang, 2016).

This thesis is founded on the theoretical arguments presented above. It assumes that a) social media gives the general public the possibility to discuss the societal issues even when the discussion is critical of the government, b) frames are used in the online commentary of the movement in an effort to influence others' views and encourage them to participate in the movement, and c) the mobilization task of movement is not only in the hands of movement organizers, but the general public also participate in it by framing issues on social media. For the analysis of the data, a more specific theoretical framework was selected and is presented in the following section.

4.2 Collective action frames

Social movement researchers have developed different types of frameworks that aim to show what kind of collective action frames are successful in mobilizing individuals and creating social movements (Goh & Pang, 2016). For this thesis, a framework by Benford and Snow (1988; 2000) is used as a guiding tool when analysing the frames employed by the commentators of the Farmers' protest. Benford and Snow argue that each social movement has its 'core framing tasks' where the movement's mobilization power comes from (Benford & Snow, 2000). Their theoretical framework divides the core framing tasks into three different categories of a) diagnostic, b) prognostic, and c) motivational framing (Snow & Benford, 1988). These three different core framing tasks form the movement's internal and external mobilizing discourse, giving people chances to identify with the movement and its message (Vicari, 2010).

The diagnostic task is focused on identifying the main problem as well as assigning blame for it. Since the aim of social movements is to change a certain situation or issue, one of the first tasks is to identify who is responsible for it and why (Benford & Snow, 2000). It is argued that within the diagnostic task it is common for social movements to argue that some authority is acting unjustly and frame themselves as victims of their actions (ibid.). It has been theorized that this kind of framing induces mobilization since it aggravates the feelings of being

under attack and in danger if action is not taken to correct the situation (Gamson, 1992; Ward & Ostrom, 2006).

The prognostic task is concerned with offering possible solutions to the problems identified during the diagnostic task. Simply put, the aim of prognostic frames is to address the question of what needs to be done in order to reach a better, alternative reality without the issues that inspired the social movement in the first place (Benford & Snow, 2000). It is typical that at least some of the prognostic frames propose collective action as a way to change the situation (ibid.). Effective prognostic framing is important for successful mobilization since if the proposed solutions are something that the individuals view as important and feel capable of doing, they are more likely to at least consider participating in them. If the movement would only highlight the problems in the society but offer no solutions to fix them, a successful mobilization would be hard to achieve.

Finally, the motivational task involves asking people to join the movement as well as giving rationale for it (Snow & Benford, 1988). Additionally it has been argued that these frames seek to legitimize the movement's actions and emphasize the rewards of participation to the current and potential protesters (Benford & Snow, 2000). The motivational tasks also involve the formation of shared vocabulary consisting of mottos and claims that with time become associated with the movement (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992). This relates to the movement's identification as a strong united group rather than as many different individuals fighting separately (Goh & Pang, 2016).

This framework of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing tasks, was selected for this study because of its strong applicability in connecting framing to the collective action problem and mobilization. Additionally, it offered great support in the coding process and made categorization of the comments easier as well as presenting the findings more clear.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

In order to research the Farmers protest's commentary on Kisan Ekta Morcha's Facebook page, a mixed methods approach is used consisting of a) quantitative content analysis examining the

frequency of different frames over time, and b) qualitative content analysis offering insight into the commentators' usage of the different frames and arguments behind them.

Content analysis, defined as a systematic technique of analysing content and compressing it into categories through standardized coding, allows going through large amounts of data in an organized way (Stemler, 2000). While quantitative and qualitative content analysis can be used separately, in this thesis the decision was made to combine both in an effort to best analyse all available data and ensure that no valuable information was lost.

The main reason for including quantitative data in this research is to be able to analyze any changes in the frequencies of different frames and subframes as the movement progresses. This opens up the possibility to see different patterns and discuss possible reasons for them.

While quantitative analysis provides an overview of the commentary and framing patterns, qualitative content analysis allows deeper insights into the nature of the commentators' use of frames, views, and arguments in their efforts to convince others. With qualitative content analysis, the aim is to observe what kind of arguments the commentators themselves see as the most capable at mobilizing (or demobilizing) others. The inclusion of qualitative analysis also partly targets the criticism of content analysis where it has been said too often to focus solely on counting words, thus missing the meaning behind the trends (Morgan, 1993).

5.2 Data collection and sample

The data collection was conducted with the help of Facepager program⁴ which automatically collected all posts on the Kisan Ekta Morcha Facebook page from 14 December 2020 to 15 March 2021 and created an Excel sheet containing the posts and their time of publishing, name, amount of likes, shares and comments. The research period starts from when the Facebook page was created and was set to end mid-March, since this left enough time for conducting the research. The motivation to use the Facepager program in this thesis is based on its capability to automate some parts of the content analysis, thus saving a lot of manual work which has been argued to be one of content analysis' weaknesses (Morgan, 1993).

⁴ The Facepager program accesses the application programming interface (API) and collects publicly available information from the chosen social media platform (Haßler et al., 2014)

In order to limit the scope, one post per week was selected, creating a dataset of 14 posts. The posts' perceived content and amounts of likes and comments were used as a guiding selection criteria. Regarding the content of the posts, the aim was to select as thematically varied content as possible, with the goal producing a final dataset of where several different types of frames would be present. Posts with higher amounts of shares and likes were favoured as this indicated that these specific posts were viewed as important by the users of the Facebook page. The final dataset of posts and their main message can be found in the appendix.

In order to limit the dataset, only one hundred comments from each post were coded, with the final dataset then consisting of 1400 comments. These were randomly selected with the Facepager program and cleaned in Excel.

5.3 Ethical considerations

There is ongoing ethical debate on whether information posted online should be considered as private information or not (Scheyvens, 2014). However, generally it has been agreed that when all of the data is kept confidential and is collected from public sites open to everyone, the research can be conducted (Skalski et al., 2015). In the case of Kisan Ekta Morcha, the Facebook page is set as public and one doesn't have to be invited or accepted to the group in order to view its content. With the page's 500,000 followers it's reasonable to assume that the commentators view their interactions as public and open for everyone to see. Therefore this thesis takes the position that the comments are public information and thus can be used as research material.

Still, a care was taken that no personal information was collected or analysed during the research. The Facepager program doesn't collect the name of the commentator but instead gives each comment a number as the new identifying factor. This assures that no comment can be linked to any specific individual and thus anonymity for each commentator was guaranteed.

5.4 Data cleaning and coding

The data cleaning process included the translation of non-English comments, checking and excluding duplicates and comments not relating explicitly to the movement, as well as correcting misspelled words. Translating was done with the help of Google Translate and additional internet

searches. Each comment was treated as a single unit of analysis and coded in Nvivo. Depending on the content and length of comment, some comments were coded multiple times and are present in several different categories.

The aim of the coding was to categorize and organize the information found in the selected comments. Both deductive and inductive coding practices were utilized, with the coding starting with categorizing each comment to one of the top codes (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational) then further dividing them to subcategories which were identified during the coding. These coding categories are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding categories							
Top codes*	Main task*	Most frequent sub-codes (mentioned over 5 times)					
Diagnostic	Identify and define problem	 Government is acting against people's best interests Government is not telling the truth The media is not telling the truth Not all have the information available regarding the laws 					
	Assign blame	 Government is harming the farmers Large business owners are harming the farmers The movement organizers not doing their best 					
	Framing the movement	 The movement is not justified The movement is justified The movement will not bring any changes 					
Prognostic	Proposing actions that government should take	 Abolish the three laws The government needs to listen to the farmers The government needs to stop their behaviour New government or leader should take power 					
	Proposing actions that the movement or individuals should take	 Avoid mainstream media Use social media to get access to truthful information Boycott the government Boycott the big corporate producers of food Listen and learn from the organizers and farm union leaders Get the attention of the international community Stay united Proposals of how to organize protest events Asking people to share the information further Include several languages Join the movement Keep the movement peaceful Organizers should inform people what the movement is about 					
Motivational	Declaring support to the movement and organizers	 Expressing support to the farmers or the movement Expressing international support Praising the organizers of the IT cell 					

jo	Motivating people to oin movement and ts message	 Noting reasons of why the farmers need to fight Farmers and protestors' sacrifice during the movement Appreciating the qualities of farmers and protestors Noting the strength of united people Asking people to join Motivating people to continue the protest Noting that the movement, farmers, or truth will win Stating the importance of farmers for the society Noting movement's positive effect so far
* Adapted from Benford	and Snow (2000)	

After the first round of coding, some of the sub-categories were combined, deleted or otherwise altered in an effort to best combine and present the findings. This was then followed by a second round of coding, mostly consisting of data validation and re-coding, with the aim of making sure that all comments were coded correctly to the right categories. For the discussion and presentation of findings, only subcodes that were mentioned over five times are included.

It should be noted that since these subcategories were inductively and subjectively identified, other researchers might have ended up with different results. Additionally, since only a fraction of the comments were analysed, by selecting different comments the findings would probably have been different. Still, as the research question is not asking to test any particular hypothesis, but rather explore prevalent frames and arguments, all information is 'correct' and 'valid' and adds knowledge to previously not studied topic.

5.5 Analysis

As Table 1 indicates, several different subframes were identified and in general this study produced large amounts of data. As the scope of this thesis is relatively limited, not all of the findings are discussed in detail. Rather the qualitative analysis in this paper is guided by the theoretical framework and focuses on the findings that indicate either that social media is giving a platform for people to express their criticism of the authorities or that social media can be used to effectively spread collective action frames aimed at mobilizing others. In the quantitative analysis, a preference is given to the most frequently employed subframes as well as cases where a clear exception or a trend can be observed and explained.

6. Findings

6.1 Quantitative findings

Throughout the research period the share of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames stayed quite similar. The monthly share of the frames is detailed in Figure 1⁵. It demonstrates that no substantial changes happened in how frequently the commentators employed different frames during the research period. The following discussion aims to offer some possible explanations for this as well as for the few changes that can be observed.

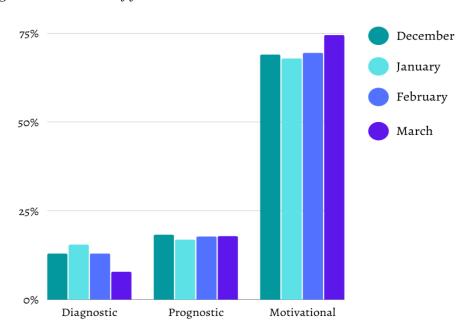


Figure 1. The share of frames over time

Motivational frames were most frequently employed by the commentators and appeared in 70.1% of all comments. This large amount of motivationally framed comments is mostly due to the fact that many of the commentators included some versions of the movement's de facto mottos of "Hail the farmer!" or "Long live farmer unity!". In addition, comments within the theme of 'I support farmers' were also frequently present. Since these types of statements were not only present as stand-alone comments, but also included in otherwise diagnostic and

 $^{\mathtt{5}}$ Tables indicating the specific percentages of each subframe are found in the appendix

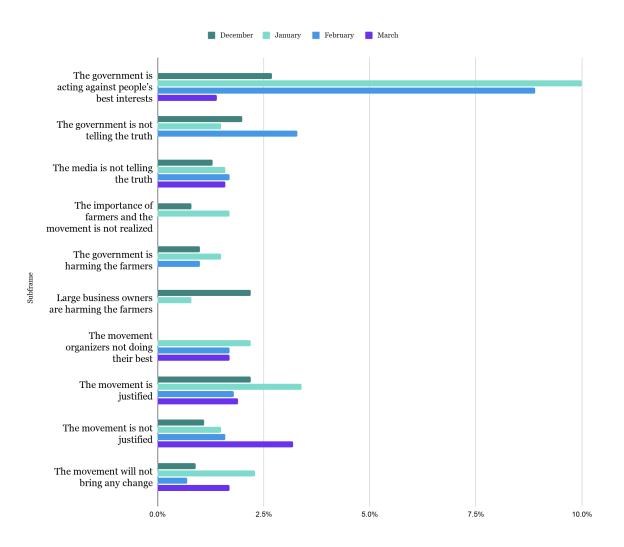
prognostic comments, motivational frames ended up being in a significant portion of the comments. It can be observed that the use of motivational frames fell a little bit in January, and thereafter slowly but steadily rose, with 74.4% of all comments in March being motivational. This increased frequency from January to March could be related to the fact motivational frames become more needed as movements prolongs. Another explanation could be that as time goes on, fewer people are willing to make the effort of writing long and complex diagnostic and prognostic comments and as a result general statements of those 'Hail the farmers', 'Long live farmer unity' or 'I support farmers' will become more frequent in the dataset.

Prognostic frames proposing possible steps and actions that the movement or the government should take, were second most frequently employed by commentators and appear in 17.6% of all comments. The share of these comments stayed largely unchanged during the research period, and therefore it could be argued that the role of prognostic framing stayed equally important at all stages of the movement.

Lastly, it can be observed that diagnostic frames were least frequently used by the commentators and counted only 12.3% of all comments. This low frequency might be explained by the fact that commentators didn't feel that this framing task was as necessary to them or the movement. A contributing factor might be the fact that others in society, such the Kisan Ekta Morcha IT cell and other media, already direct a lot of effort to diagnostic framing and because of this, the individual commentators might feel that their contributions to it are not as needed. It can be observed that diagnostic frames were most frequently employed in January, but fell quite sharply from there with only 7.8% of the comments being diagnostic in March. This might be explained by the fact that as the movement prolongs, the diagnostic task has already previously been filled, and thus it is clear to all who and what the movement's antagonists and problems are.

When looking at the frequency of all subframes, more variation can be observed. Starting with diagnostic frames, detailed in Figure 2, it can be observed that comments arguing that the government is acting against people's interests, stands out as the most popular subframe within the diagnostic category.

Figure 2. The share of diagnostic frames



^{*} The percentage (%) is the frequency of the subframe in the total dataset, (i.e. not within the diagnostic frames)

Especially in January and February, the commentators clearly felt the importance of framing the government as an unjust actor. This spike in data is most likely related to a tractor parade the farmer's organized on January 26. At this event, the so-far mostly peaceful protest turned violent when some of the protestors breached the barricades and resorted to vandalism and damaged public property. The Delhi police responded to this with tear gas, beatings and arrests (Kuchey, 2021). As a lot of controversy was expressed about this event, it can be assumed the

commentators felt the importance of framing the government as the antagonist and highlighting the unfairness of their action.

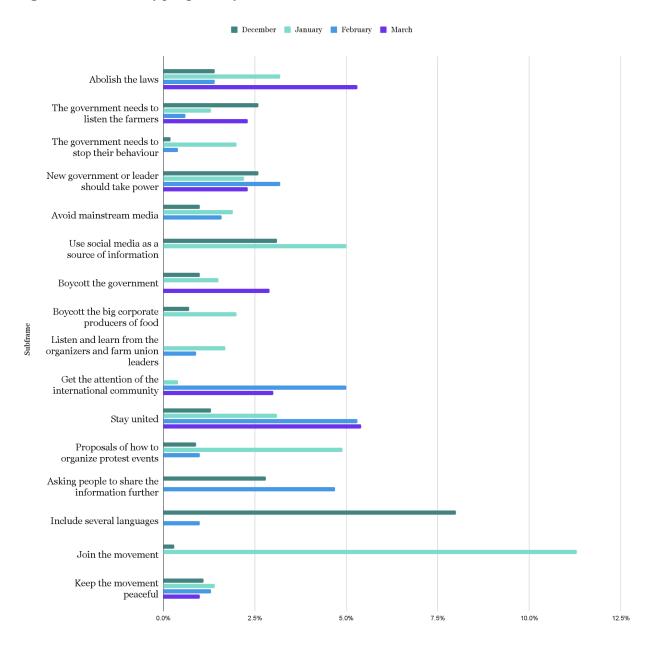
Another observation is that no comments in December targeted the organizers of the movement or the IT cell. However, as the Facebook page grew older, critical arguments became more frequent. This could be related to a couple different factors. Firstly, it is possible that as the Facebook page grew in popularity, more individuals opposing the movement discovered the page and wanted to make their criticism heard. Second possibility is that once people start to feel frustrated with the movement's lack of success, they try to find someone to blame. Now, in addition to the government, the movement organizers will receive some of this criticism as they are the ones who haven't brought the results.

Some comments also note that one of the problems hindering the protest is that the importance of farmers and the movement to Indian society is not realized. No such comments were made in February and March, and while this might just be a coincidence in the dataset, it could also indicate that as the movement went on, people felt more positive about the protest arguments' visibility in the society.

When it comes to the framing of protest itself as either justified or unjustified, it can be observed that with time the sentiment of the protest not being justified became more frequent. It should be noted that the subframe of 'The movement is justified' only included comments that directly stated this and therefore the true share of individuals viewing the movement as justified is much larger than what the chart indicates. Still, the rising share of commentators viewing the movement as unjustified as time went on, could indicate that keeping the public on the movement's side for long periods of time is difficult. For further research this proposes an interesting question of whether this trend would continue as the movement prolongs even more.

Moving to the prognostic frames, detailed in Figure 3, it is evident that several different solutions to help the farmers and movement were suggested by the commentators. Possible solutions that were mentioned in each of the four months were quite expectedly the arguments that the laws need to be abolished, that the government must listen to the farmers' demands as well as the suggestion that a new leader or government should take power. All of these address the governing powers and thus are not really actions that the movement leaders or protestors themselves can take.

Figure 3. *The share of prognostic frames*



^{*} The percentage (%) is the frequency of the subframe in the total dataset

To this point, several solutions or actions for the movement participants were also suggested throughout the research period. Mentioned in all of the four months were the pleas of staying united and keeping the movement peaceful. It is interesting to note that comments asking for unity became more frequent as time went on. This most likely relates to the fact that while some people began criticizing the movement or its organizers, these other commentators asking

for unity wanted to highlight the fact that infighting within the movement only hurts the protesters' possibility of achieving change.

Reaching the attention of the international community was also frequently suggested as something that could help the movement. These kind comments were most popular in February and March, which could indicate that while initially trying to deal with the issue of the farm laws nationally, later when this method didn't bring results, more commentators felt that the help of the international community could be beneficial.

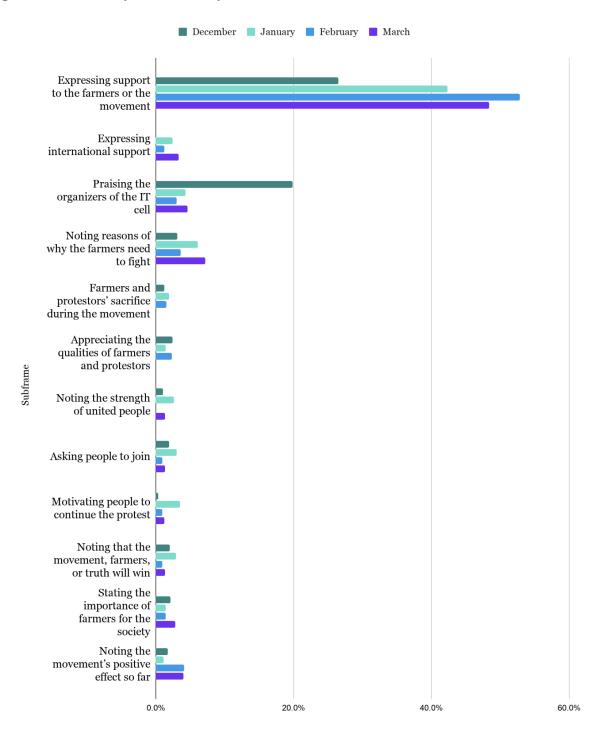
In January several comments made different suggestions to how to organize the protest events. The spike here is explained by the January 26 tractor parade, to which organization several commentators wanted to contribute to. Also in January there is a large spike in comments recommending joining the protest as part of the solution. It is possible that these commentators highly believed in the tractor parade's power of making the farmers' voices heard and wanted to make sure that as many people as possible would participate in it.

Another notable proposition is the recommendation, especially in December, to use other languages outside of Punjabi as this would make the farmers more universally understood. This recommendation was closely followed and after December mostly only English and Hindi were used by the commentators, which probably explains the decline of these comments.

Some other relatively often made suggestions were the recommendations of avoiding traditional media and using social media as an alternative source of information as well as asking the organizers and other individuals to share the information further.

Finally, looking into the category of motivationally framed comments, detailed in Figure 4, one subcategory clearly dominates the dataset. The share of comments that express support to either the farmers or the movement is around 40% in the total dataset. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, this relates to the very high frequency of the movement's mottos and comments such as 'I support farmers' and 'We stand with the protest'. In December this subframe was less frequent than in the later months. When looking at the chart, this can be theorized to be because in December most people reserved their supportive comments to the organizers of the Kisan Ekta Morcha, rather than the farmers or the protest.

Figure 4. The share of motivational frames



^{*} The percentage (%) is the frequency of the subframe in the total dataset

Another notable observation is that the subcategory of 'Noting reasons of why the farmers need to fight' was employed fairly frequently throughout the research period. Here it could be assumed that the commentators felt that by giving concrete examples of what is at stake in this protest, they could motivate others to join or stay in the movement.

Other quite frequently used motivations were comments that noted the importance of farmers in the Indian society as well as that the movement will win in the end. Some commentators also used the movement's positive effect as a motivation to continue it. The fact that these types of comments were relatively frequently employed throughout the research period, could indicate that the commentators viewed them as effective frames capable of motivating and mobilizing others.

6.2 Qualitative findings

6.2.1 Diagnostic frames

While the diagnostic frames weren't employed that frequently, they still play an important role in the movement's mobilization task by identifying the actors that the movement should fight against as well as discussing problems that movement should solve.

It is clear that the government is framed as the main antagonist of the movement with several commentators for example noting how the governing powers are engaged in ruining the farmers:

"The government is playing into the hands of 4-5 rich people to ruin the farmers"

"This is a conspiracy to kill farmers economically. Ultimately these laws will kill us politically too. They are willing to see the farmers in rags"

Commonly asserted criticism about the government's behaviour was that they are working together with both the media and police, dictating their acts in a way that goes against the farmers' and the movement's interests. Another visible concern in the comments was the government's efforts in trying to divide and break the unity of farmers and as one commentator put it, "dismantle world's biggest agitation". All these previous types of comments contribute to

the diagnostic task of mobilization since they clearly state the actor who the movement should be fighting against as well as note reasons for this fight.

Several commentators have argued that one of the problems hindering the movement's ability to make its arguments heard, is the fact that both the government and media are untruthful. In this category the comments' aim seems to be to highlight the fact the government shouldn't be trusted. In regards to the mainstream media's behaviour, the commentators for example argued that:

"Media is giving false information against this peasant indiscrimination"

"The Godi media is misleading the countrymen"

This term 'Godi media' was frequently used by the commentators and refers to a 'lapdog' media that speaks only in favour of the ruling government and thus is biased in its broadcast of events and even acts as an extension of the government (Husain, 2020). By highlighting the government and media's untrustworthiness, the commentators are motivating others to stay on the right (i.e. the farmers') side of the argument. This contributes to the mobilization task since if the protesting farmers are successfully framed as more truthful than the media and government, their statements of the movement's necessity and requests of joining the protest are more likely to be trusted and followed.

As the Facebook page grew older, some criticism was also assigned to its organizers as well as other movement leaders. The commentators for example question the leaders' true motivations with statements such as:

"You are just ruining the farmers by misleading them, you are not a farmer leader, you are a political broker"

Some commentators clearly feel that the leaders of the movement do not have the same concerns as the regular farmers, and are instead driven by political agenda. The existence of these types of comments highlights the fact that while frames aimed to mobilize others might successfully spread on social media, messages aimed to disrupt or question the mobilization process can be communicated just as easily.

In the subcategory of 'The movement is justified' the commentators mainly highlight different reasons for why they protestors have a legitimate reason for their agitation as well categorize it as peaceful and unharmful. Several commentators have for example noted the fact that "Peaceful protest our right appeal". In this category the government's actions are condemned while the farmers' are praised. These types of comments again contribute to the mobilization task since they argue for the movement's legitimacy and rightfulness and note that if you join the movement you're on the right side of argument. Of course, the movement is not only viewed in a positive light and some comments also give reasons why the protest is unjustified and illegitimate. Several reasons for this are given, targeting mainly the fact that the protestors don't actually represent Indian farmers and that the protesters are attacking their own country. Some also frame the movement as violent and illegal. The aim of these comments is to demobilize by arguing against the points about the protest's legitimacy.

Lastly, some people frame the movement as justified, but incapable of affecting any change. Most of these commentators claim that the government is too powerful or uninterested to listen to the farmers' concerns with one commentator arguing that:

"Till you defeat BJP in elections. Until then nothing happens. BJP/RSS don't give a rat's ass about Farmers' movement or any other movement."

While the aim of these commentators might not be to hinder the mobilization, they might inadvertently contribute to it. This is because if the view that no action or movement is powerful enough to fight against the government gains popularity, individuals can feel uninspired to take action since participation in these cases is thought to only have negative consequences with no benefits.

In conclusion, it can be observed that the diagnostic frames contribute to the mobilization task of the Farmers' protest in several ways. Powerful arguments both for and against the movement are made, and the commentators clearly are using collective action frames as a way of trying to influence other people's views on the laws and the movement. All in all, it is clear that these commentators on Facebook are taking a part of the mobilization task for themselves, thus confirming the theoretical argument made by Bimber et al. (2005) that social media is changing the dynamics of social movement mobilization.

6.2.2 Prognostic frames

As discussed in the theoretical framework section, the prognostic framing task connects to mobilization in that it gives the movement participants concrete suggestions on how to take collective action and fight against the societal issues that the diagnostic frames identified. This is helpful since if people know possible ways to help, the barrier to participate is lower.

One suggestion to help the movement is the simple recommendation of joining the protest. Here the commentators typically argue that everybody's contribution is needed in order to beat the government. Some examples from these types of comments are:

"Not only farmers, everyone should raise their voice against bjp government"

"All those who are watching this and texting here needs to get out NOW and support farmers"

These findings correspond with the theoretical argument that often taking collective action is suggested as a solution when individuals frame societal issues (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Pleas of staying united were the most frequently offered solution to better the movement and effectively fight against the government. Here following types comments were typical:

"Stay united, togetherness is our strength"

"It is a humble request to respected leaders to stop blaming each other. It is time to show strong and sensitive leadership to keep youngsters united and active"

The argument of staying united can be a powerful tool in mobilizing people, since it reminds people who their 'real' enemy is and thus makes the movement's goal more clear. Also staying united is a relatively simple action that most of the movement participants are capable of doing.

Some of the concrete suggestions that the commentators make are the requests of using languages outside of Punjabi as well as sharing the information further. The goal of both of these suggestions is to make sure that farmers' message reaches as wide a population as possible. As one commentator, addressing the issue with language barriers, put it "It should be written in the

language of absolutely every region so that there is awareness among the people of every region", it seems that several commentators felt that communicating only in Punjabi is not of the best strategy of making the farmers' argument known on the national level.

One other important and frequently made suggestion is that the current governing powers should resign with some also arguing that the farmers should be the ones taking on this political role. Here it was for example argued that:

"If the government can't remove the 3 bills, let's remove the Modi government from power"

"Boycott all political parties in the next election and select from these farmers. True leaders will emerge from these farmers only! This is an opportunity to change the current political system"

While this solution is maybe not as easily applicable for the individual protestors, it definitely speaks to the whole movement's solution to change the farmer's situation. These comments discuss how to more structurally improve India's farming sector. This could motivate people to participate in the movement, since if successful, the gained benefits could be great for the individual farmers.

The argument that social media offers solutions for people to share and access information that is critical of the governing powers, is expressed also by the commentators. To this point, suggestions were made to both avoid mainstream media as well as use social media as a way of gaining access to more trustworthy information. Here the commentators for example note that:

"Best way to deal with godi media is to not watch all their fake news and communal propaganda"

"Only listen to Kisan Ekta Morcha guys. Not viral cheap videos by godi media"

In general many commentators felt really appreciative of the Facebook page and thanked its power to expose the government's lies and share the truth.

It can be observed that most of the time there is a strong link between the diagnostic and prognostic frames, where quite often the comments both identify problems and offer solutions to them. In regards to the mobilization task, it is promising that at least some of the suggested solutions are things that individuals could actually do, such as use Hindi or English, share information, stay united and join the movement. This can benefit the movement since in general, the easier any task is the more likely it will get done.

6.2.3 Motivational frames

Motivational frames were most commonly used by the commentators and connect to the mobilization task in several ways. Starting with the comments, popular in December, where the commentators express their gratitude to the organizers of the Kisan Ekta Morcha's Facebook page, it is clear that several commentators felt that they have a significant role in the movement. The commentators often praised the idea of creating the page and noted its importance in disseminating the farmers' message and exposing the government's lies. By highlighting the page's importance, the commentators create value for it and possibly contribute to the organizers motivation of keeping the page active throughout the movement. In the same category were also coded comments that expressed support for the movement-wide leadership. By praising the leaders, the commentators contribute to the task of creating legitimacy for the movement and its message.

As noted in the quantitative analysis, comments that express support for the movement, protestors or farmers were by far the most frequently employed subframe. Here several different types of statements were made, for example:

"Well done! We all are standing with the farmers side"

"This is great. Farmers make a new history for future generations. Full support from every farmer and their families"

These types of comments contribute to the mobilization task by making the protesters know that they are not alone in their dissatisfaction with the laws and their actions are approved by others in the society. This lets the prospective protesters know their possible participation in the movement will be appreciated and their actions viewed as justified. In this category the movement's motto of "Hail the farmer!" and "Long live farmer unity!" were also created and frequently used. As discussed in the theoretical section, the creation of the movement's shared language is often an important part of the mobilization process, since this differentiates the movement from others as well as strengthen the 'we' sentiment among the participants (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Some other ways that the commentators aimed to motivate others, were notions of the farmers' sacrifice for example:

"It's farmers' sons who are protecting the country in such adverse conditions and even sacrificing their lives for it"

"Leaders are senior citizens. They can enjoy life at home but they are fighting for Indian public"

This links to mobilization in that these types of comments highlight the absolute necessity of the movement. The argument that commentators are making here is that if people are willing to die for their cause, it must be truly important and thus should be supported and joined by everybody.

The commentators also highlighted several different reasons for what the protestors are fighting for and why the movement needs to continue. Some frequently noted reasons were the fight for the farmer as well as human rights, India's future, justice, democracy and against oppressive policies and the government's anti-national agenda. It was also commonly argued that the farmers' fight is should in the interest of the whole India, with one commentator for example arguing that:

"This farmers' movement has to succeed. It will save our whole country. The lives of ordinary citizens are at stake, not just farmers"

As with comments talking about the farmers' sacrifice, the comments in this category contribute to the movement's mobilization task by clarifying its necessity. Additionally, the cost of losing or ending the protest is made clear by these comments. In a similar line of arguments, some

commentators highlight the importance of farmers in the Indian society, for example arguing that they are the backbone of the country, and necessary for India's food security. The slogans of "Save farmers. Save our country" and "No farmer, no food" were mentioned several times in this category. These again aim to motivate people by making it explicitly clear that the movement is vital in bringing justice for the farmers who in turn are essential for India.

Finally, it can be observed that some commentators use the movement's positive effect as a reason for keeping it going on. Here it was for example noted that:

"The farmers of our nation did a very important deed by doing the press conference exposing the truth to the world"

"This movement brought the unity which this government had so mercilessly destroyed by their divisive attitude"

This ensures trust in the movement's possibility to affect change and successfully challenge the government. Additionally, it was also argued that as long as the protest continues, the farmers, the movement and truth will win. Highlighting this winning quality of movement is an important motivating factor since if people believe in their possibility to affect change they are more likely to participate.

The comments that were part of this motivational framing task do in several ways contribute to the mobilization process. They indicate that there is widespread support for the movement and protesters, highlight movement's necessity for every Indian, as well as encourage others to believe that if continued, the movement is actually going to be successful in forcing the government to take down the laws and ensure MSP for the farmers' crops.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to connect the themes of mobilization, framing and social media in the same empirical study, and examine how collective action frames were employed by the general public in their efforts to mobilize others for the Farmers' protest. The findings of this thesis indicate that the commentators on the Kisan Ekta Morcha's Facebook page clearly contributed to the Farmers protest's mobilization task by using collective action frames in their

communication. The commentary effectively identifies who the movement is fighting against and why, notes problems with how the protest is organized and suggests solutions to them, as well as gives the participants several different motivations for why their support and participation is necessary. While it can't be determined if this discussion in actuality contributed to the amount of protestors participating in the streets, the findings do indicate that there is evidence for social media offering a platform where collective action frames can be spread freely by the general public, thus contributing towards overcoming the collective action problem.

Several different directions for future research can be drawn from this thesis. One of the most obvious ones is to follow the commentary until the end of the movement, and see whether and how the dynamics of using collective action frames change during this time. It would also be interesting to add a comparative factor of India's mainstream media and see if and how their framing of the movement differs from what is present on the Facebook page. As the arguments here about the connection between the frames and mobilization are only theoretical, one avenue for further research could be to analyse if there is a linkage between framing and the amounts of people that decide to join the protest at the street level. Finally, as this study is very case specific to Kisan Ekta Morcha and the Farmers' protest, focusing on different social media sites or groups in different countries would make a valuable contribution to this strand of research.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 - Selected posts

Message / Topic	Date	Туре	Shares	Likes
Addressing the United Nation's Human Rights Council	2021-03-15	video	3456	8332
Press Conference on recent events	2021-03-10	video	1342	5253
Reaction to the Narendra Tomar's stament	2021-03-07	video	2668	10812
Keep the movement going on	2021-02-27	video	3489	17713
A discussion about the Haryana Agriculture Minister	2021-02-15	video	749	3553
Dedicate the protest for the younger generations	2021-02-10	photo	3482	14189
Protest In the World's Largest Democracy	2021-02-02	video	1814	3604
Reporting on the current situation at the Ghazipur Border.	2021-01-28	video	13553	43506
A response to the video released by the police administration	2021-01-23	video	2062	4984
Rejecting the agricultural bills, the farmers expressed their anger by burning the agricultural bills	2021-01-13	video	2036	11237
Farmers conducted a tractor march as a rehearsal of the proposed Jan 26 Parade	2021-01-08	photo	6766	32398
If you try dismiss our occupation we will fight back	2021-01-01	photo	2350	14716
Exposing Modi's lies	2020-12-26	video	64711	74893
Kisan Morcha starts from today	2020-12-16	video	3614	5911

9.2 Appendix 2 - Frequency of the frames

Frame	December	January	February	March	Total
Diagnostic	12.9%	15.4%	12.9%	7.8%	12.3%
Prognostic	18.2%	16.8%	17.7%	17.8%	17.6%
Motivational	68.9%	67.8%	69.4%	74.4%	70.1%

9.3 Appendix 3 - Frequency of the subframes

Diagnostic frames

Subframe	December	January	February	March	Total count
The government is acting against people's best interests	2.7%	10.0%	8.9%	1.4%	90
The government is not telling the truth	2.0%	1.5%	3.3%	0.0%	19
The media is not telling the truth	1.3%	1.6%	1.7%	1.6%	17
The importance of farmers and the movement is not realized	0.8%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	6
The government is harming the farmers	1.0%	1.5%	1.0%	0.0%	9
Large business owners are harming the farmers	2.2%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	6
The movement organizers not doing their best	0.0%	2.2%	1.7%	1.7%	9
The movement is justified	2.2%	3.4%	1.8%	1.9%	27
The movement is not justified	1.1%	1.5%	1.6%	3.2%	14
The movement will not bring any change	0.9%	2.3%	0.7%	1.7%	10

Prognostic frames

Subframe	December	January	February	March	Total count
Abolish the laws	1.4%	3.2%	1.4%	5.3%	35
The government needs to listen the farmers	2.6%	1.3%	0.6%	2.3%	16
The government needs to stop their behaviour	0.2%	2.0%	0.4%	0.0%	5
New government or leader should take power	2.6%	2.2%	3.2%	2.3%	21
Avoid mainstream media	1.0%	1.9%	1.6%	0.0%	10
Use social media as a source of information	3.1%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	22
Boycott the government	1.0%	1.5%	0.0%	2.9%	9
Boycott the big corporate producers of food	0.7%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5
Listen and learn from the organizers and farm union leaders	0.0%	1.7%	0.9%	0.0%	6
Get the attention of the international community	0.0%	0.4%	5.0%	3.0%	9
Stay united	1.3%	3.1%	5.3%	5.4%	57
Proposals of how to organize protest events	0.9%	4.9%	1.0%	0.0%	21
Asking people to share the information further	2.8%	0.0%	4.7%	0.0%	13
Include several languages	8.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	18
Join the movement	0.3%	11.3%	0.0%	0.0%	14
Keep the movement peaceful	1.1%	1.4%	1.3%	1.0%	11

Motivational frames

Subframe	December	January	February	March	Total count
Expressing support to the farmers or the movement	26.5%	42.4%	52.8%	48.4%	654
Expressing international support	0.0%	2.5%	1.3%	3.3%	16
Praising the organizers of the IT cell	19.9%	4.3%	3.0%	4.6%	126
Noting reasons of why the farmers need to fight	3.1%	6.1%	3.6%	7.2%	81
Farmers and protestors' sacrifice during the movement	1.3%	2.0%	1.6%	0.0%	18
Appreciating the qualities of farmers and protestors	2.5%	1.5%	2.4%	0.0%	20
Noting the strength of united people	1.1%	2.6%	0.0%	1.4%	17
Asking people to join	2.0%	3.0%	1.0%	1.4%	15
Motivating people to continue the protest	0.4%	3.5%	1.0%	1.3%	24
Noting that the movement, farmers, or truth will win	2.1%	2.9%	1.0%	1.4%	34
Stating the importance of farmers for the society	2.2%	1.5%	1.5%	2.8%	26
Noting the movement's positive effect so far	1.8%	1.2%	4.1%	4.0%	28