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Civic Apathy v Digital Activism: A Tale of Two Indias

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In contemporary India, a compelling paradox has emerged: while digital platforms brim with activism, the real-world civic landscape often reflects disengagement and apathy. This paper examines the widening gap between digital activism and civic apathy, highlighting how online participation does not necessarily translate into offline action. Through a socio-political lens, the study contrasts the two 'Indias': one that passionately voices dissent and advocacy online, and another that remains indifferent to basic civic duties, such as voting, attending local meetings, or engaging with grassroots governance. This article critically examines whether digital activism is fostering meaningful change or merely offering a performative illusion of participation. By analysing case studies of hashtag movements like #MeTooIndia, #FarmersProtest, and environmental campaigns, the research evaluates the efficacy and limitations of digital spaces as tools of democratic expression. Simultaneously, it addresses the reasons behind civic disengagement, including systemic disenchantment, lack of awareness, and urban alienation. The paper proposes that both digital and civic must converge to create an informed, empowered citizenry. It further emphasises the need for digital literacy, institutional transparency, and policy reforms to encourage civic participation beyond screens. Ultimately, this article calls for a reimagination of activism that harmonises technology with tangible civic responsibility, aiming to bridge the divide between virtual awareness and on-ground action.

Keywords: *civic engagement, digital activism, political apathy, online participation, hashtag movements.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, India has witnessed a dramatic transformation in the landscape of civic engagement, marked by the meteoric rise of digital activism. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become powerful tools for mobilising young citizens, enabling them to form virtual communities, amplify their voices, and organise collective action with unprecedented speed and reach[1]. This digital surge is not only reshaping political participation but also democratizing access to advocacy, allowing even those in remote or marginalised communities to participate in national conversations and movements.[2]

Yet, this digital enthusiasm presents a paradox. While online activism flourishes, traditional forms of civic engagement such as voting, attending public meetings, or participating in grassroots campaigns often lag, especially among urban youth. The phenomenon of slacktivism or symbolic online participation frequently substitutes for deeper, sustained involvement in offline civic life.[3] This disconnect raises critical questions about the true impact of digital activism on India's democratic processes: Does online engagement translate into tangible social or political change, or does it mask a growing apathy towards real-world civic duties?

This article seeks to unravel the complex relationship between digital activism and civic apathy in contemporary India. The primary objectives are fourfold. First, to analyse the rise and patterns of digital activism, particularly among Indian youth. Second, to explore the paradox of high online engagement versus low offline participation. Third, to assess the implications of this divide for democratic participation and policy-making. And finally, to offer practical recommendations for bridging the gap between online enthusiasm and offline action.

The study is guided by the following key research questions: What are the driving forces behind the surge in digital activism in India? Why does online civic engagement often fail to translate into offline participation? What are the socio-political consequences of this digital/offline divide for Indian democracy?

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[1] Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (Yale University Press 2017)
[2] Payal Arora, *Next Billion Users: Digital Life Beyond the West* (HUP 2019) 86–88
[3] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (Public Affairs 2011) ch 4

To address these questions, the paper employs a mixed-methods approach. It draws on content analysis of prominent online movements, such as the Anti-CAA protests and the #hokkolorob campaign[4], to understand the nature and effectiveness of digital advocacy. Additionally, it utilises survey data collected from Indian youth. To capture their perspectives on civic duty and activism. Qualitative interviews with activists and policy experts further enrich the study by providing grounded insights into the motivations behind digital engagement and the structural barriers to offline participation. By situating the discussion within the broader context of India's evolving digital society, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how technology both empowers and constrains civic participation. Ultimately, it seeks to illuminate the path toward a more balanced and effective model of democratic engagement, one where digital awareness is complemented by active, real-world civic responsibility.

UNDERSTANDING THE TWO INDIAS

Digital India represents the tech-driven, hyperconnected urban populace leveraging platforms like Twitter and Instagram for activism, enabled by initiatives such as the government's 2015 Digital India campaign to expand internet access and digital literacy. In contrast, Civic India embodies traditional, offline civic participation, voting, community meetings, and grassroots organising, often more prevalent in rural or socio-economically marginalised groups with limited digital access.[5]

A stark urban-rural divide underpins this duality: while 67% of urban Indians use the internet, only 31% in rural areas do. Caste and religion further exacerbate disparities. ST and SC households are 7–8% less likely to access computers than the general-category group. Urban youth, equipped with smartphones and high-speed internet, dominate digital activism, whereas rural populations, constrained by infrastructure gaps and lower literacy, remain reliant on conventional civic channels.

[4] Sajni Mukherjee, 'The movement that shook Kolkata' *India Today* (09 March 2015) <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/supplement/story/20150309-the-movement-that-shook-kolkata-817686-2015-02-27> accessed 15 May 2025

[5] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale University Press 2003) 23–25

Urban centres benefit from concentrated digital infrastructure, enabling rapid mobilisation around movements like #FarmersProtest or #MeToo[6]. Government programs like Aadhaar and MyGov prioritise urban accessibility, creating a feedback loop where technology amplifies urban voices while rural areas lag. By 2025, 56% of new internet users will be rural, yet persistent gaps in device ownership and digital skills hinder meaningful participation[7].

Urban youth increasingly favour digital activism for its immediacy and reach, with 65% of new female internet users expected by 2025. However, this often manifests as slacktivism, liking posts or sharing hashtags without deeper offline commitments. Rural youth, though gradually gaining connectivity, face structural barriers (e.g. affordability, censorship) that limit both digital and civic engagement, perpetuating a cycle of disenfranchisement.

This bifurcation underscores a critical tension: while digital tools democratize activism for some, they risk deepening inequalities for others, creating parallel realities of participation in India's democracy.

DIGITAL ACTIVISM: THE RISE OF THE ONLINE VOICE

The digital revolution has profoundly altered the landscape of political engagement and public discourse in India. Digital activism, often referred to as clicktivism or hashtag activism, is the use of digital tools, particularly social media platforms, to promote, organise, and mobilise around socio-political issues.[8] In the Indian context, digital activism has rapidly evolved from a fringe method of expression to a central mechanism for civic engagement, advocacy, and protest, especially among youth and urban populations.[9]

India's digital activism began to gain traction with the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare in 2011, where platforms like Facebook and Twitter played a supporting role in organising protests and spreading awareness. Since then, the internet has become a

[6] Namita Bhandare, 'My #MeToo moment goes back 30 years and I have the right to be angry' *The Print* (08 October 2018) <https://theprint.in/opinion/my-metoo-moment-goes-back-30-years-and-i-have-the-right-to-be-angry/131151/> accessed 15 May 2025
[7] Chavi Asrani, 'Bridging the Digital Divide in India: Barriers to Adoption and Usage' (*Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations*, June 2020) <https://icrier.org/pdf/Bridging_the_Digital_Divide_in_India.pdf> accessed 15 May 2025
[8] Tufekci (n 1)
[9] 'Digital Natives with a Cause? Thinkathon: Position Paper' (*The Centre for Internet and Society*, 2012) <https://cis-india.org/digital-natives/publications/position-paper/view#:~:text=The%20Digital%20Natives%20with%20a,people%20in%20emerging%20ICT%20contexts.> accessed 15 May 2025

democratic arena where issues often neglected by mainstream media receive public attention. Today, platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp serve as the backbone of digital activism, allowing instantaneous sharing of information, formation of virtual communities, and the viral spread of political narratives.[10]

Twitter has emerged as a real-time news source and a platform for mobilisation. Hashtags create momentum, bring visibility, and unite users under a common cause.[11] Instagram, with its visual and story-driven format, appeals to younger users and is often used for infographics, reels, and protest art. YouTube hosts long-form explanatory content, protest documentation, and campaign videos, while WhatsApp groups form grassroots nodes for organising local responses.

Among the most impactful digital movements in India was #MeTooIndia, a movement that erupted in 2018 following global momentum. It empowered women across professions to speak out against sexual harassment, particularly in the media, entertainment, and academia.[12] What began as a trickle of personal narratives transformed into a national reckoning with patriarchal structures and workplace misconduct. Though the legal and institutional response was inconsistent, the movement successfully altered public discourse around gender justice and consent, showcasing the power of online platforms in challenging systemic silence.[13]

Another significant case was the #FarmersProtest, one of the largest mobilisations in recent Indian history. Social media played a vital role in uniting farmers across states, countering misinformation, and drawing global attention. Viral images, live streams, and solidarity hashtags kept the momentum alive even during COVID-19 lockdowns. The digital reach

[10] Nishant Shah, 'Whose Change Is It, Anyway?' (*CIS India*, 2013) <https://cis-india.org/digital-natives/blog/whose-change-is-it-anyway.pdf> accessed 15 May 2025
[11] Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (CUP 2001) 133–136
[12] Bhandare (n 6)
[13] Gunjankumar Santre, 'THE #MeToo MOVEMENT'S IMPACT ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION LAW' (2022) 2(3) JLRJS <https://jlrjs.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/158.-Gunjankumar-Santre.pdf> accessed 15 May 2025

pressured both national and international entities to respond, eventually resulting in the government repealing the contentious farm laws in 2021[14].

Environmental digital activism has also grown, with campaigns like #SaveAarey becoming emblematic. In Mumbai, citizens opposed the felling of trees in the Aarey forest for metro construction. Instagram stories, online petitions, and Twitter storms garnered widespread attention, compelling courts to intervene and pause the deforestation.[15]. This movement highlighted how localised environmental issues can become national debates through digital platforms.[16]

The core strengths of digital activism lie in its speed, virality, and inclusivity. Information travels faster than ever, enabling immediate mobilisation. Movements that may once have remained confined to small regions can now capture national attention. Moreover, digital platforms offer space to marginalised voices often excluded from traditional media. However, while digital activism offers unprecedented visibility, the challenge remains in transforming online momentum into sustained offline change.[17]

CIVIC APATHY: THE SILENT MAJORITY

While digital platforms are increasingly vibrant with political expression, India's offline civic space often reflects a contrasting reality, one marked by silence, passivity, and disengagement. Civic apathy refers to a widespread lack of interest, motivation, or involvement in public affairs, particularly in conventional democratic processes such as voting, attending community meetings, or holding public officials accountable. Despite India being the world's largest democracy, a significant portion of its population remains uninvolved in routine civic duties.[18]

[14] 'Timeline: Indian farmers' yearlong protests against farm laws' *Aljazeera* (19 November 2021) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/19/timeline-india-farmers-year-long-protests-farm-laws> accessed 15 May 2025
[15] Bombay High Court, *Zoru Bhathena v State of Maharashtra* (2019) PIL No. 152/2019 (Bombay HC).
[16] Shivani Kumar, 'Explained | Aarey forest controversy: How an environmental issue became a political one' *Hindustan Times* (03 July 2022) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/explained-aarey-forest-controversy-how-an-environmental-issue-became-a-political-one-101656862633738.html> accessed 15 May 2025
[17] Morozov (n 3)
[18] Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History* (HUP 2013)

This apathy is evident in voter turnout data and local governance participation. Although national elections saw relatively high participation of around 67% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, this enthusiasm rarely extends to state and municipal levels. Urban voter turnout, in particular, is alarmingly low; for instance, Mumbai recorded just over 55% voter turnout in 2019, while local body elections often struggle to cross even the 40% mark.[19] Participation in panchayats, resident welfare associations, and public grievance forums is sporadic and unstructured, showing that many citizens disengage once the ballot is cast, if at all.

Several interrelated factors contribute to this civic disengagement. One of the most critical is institutional mistrust. Many Indians, especially youth and urban middle-class citizens, perceive public institutions such as municipal corporations, police, and even the judiciary as inefficient, corrupt, or unresponsive.[20] This breeds a sense of helplessness and the belief that individual participation makes little difference.

Secondly, there exists a significant gap in civic education and awareness. While the Indian education system focuses heavily on rote academics, civic literacy knowledge about rights, duties, governance structures, and participatory mechanisms is largely neglected. This lack of awareness leads to the underutilization of democratic tools such as RTI (Right to Information), public consultations, and local civic platforms.

Urban alienation further exacerbates the problem. In rapidly urbanising cities, individuals are often isolated in their private spheres, prioritising professional and personal responsibilities over community engagement. The pressure of daily life leaves little room for civic duties that do not offer immediate returns. Moreover, the pace and structure of urban living discourage collective action, unlike rural or semi-urban communities where local governance is more accessible.

Lastly, there exists a deep disconnect between rights awareness and duty fulfilment. While digital media has contributed significantly to the spread of awareness about individual rights, ranging from privacy to expression, this is not matched by a parallel understanding or practice of civic responsibilities. Advocacy for accountability from the state is rarely

[19] Milan Vaishnav, *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics* (Harper Collins India 2017)
[20] 'State of Democracy in South Asia-I' (*CSDS*) <https://www.lokniti.org/otherstudies/state-of-democracy-in-south-asia-i-198> accessed 15 May 2025

accompanied by introspection about one's duties as a citizen, such as voting, paying taxes, or participating in local governance.

The result is a fragmented civic culture where a minority, often the vocal digital elite, commands discourse, while the majority remains disengaged or indifferent. This civic apathy undermines democratic consolidation and poses a challenge to the legitimacy and responsiveness of governance institutions. Therefore, fostering a culture of offline engagement is imperative to complement the rise of digital activism and ensure a robust, participatory democracy.

THE ILLUSION OF PARTICIPATION: SLACKTIVISM VS REAL IMPACT

In the era of digital connectivity, activism has found new spaces of expression: tweets, Instagram reels, change.org petitions, and viral hashtags. However, this online participation often conceals a deeper problem: the illusion of engagement without genuine commitment. This phenomenon, widely referred to as slacktivism, represents a form of superficial involvement where individuals perform symbolic gestures liking, sharing, or commenting, without undertaking meaningful action in the real world.[21] While such gestures may raise awareness, they rarely translate into sustained civic efforts or policy-level change.

Performative activism, a related concept, thrives on social validation and visibility rather than intent or impact.[22] The act of posting a black square, changing a profile picture, or sharing an infographic is often more about identity signalling than about social transformation. These actions provide individuals with a sense of moral satisfaction and solidarity, but they lack follow-through. For instance, during the #MeTooIndia movement, many influencers and celebrities voiced support online, but only a few engaged in institutional reforms, filed complaints, or supported survivor networks. This gap underscores the limitations of digital advocacy when divorced from offline commitment.

From a psychological perspective, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of moral licensing. By performing small, visible acts of good, individuals may feel that they have done their part, thus reducing the likelihood of engaging in more demanding tasks such as organising rallies, attending court hearings, volunteering, or writing to elected

[21] Tufekci (n 1)
[22] Ethan Zuckerman, *Rewire: Digital Cosmopolitans in the Age of Connection* (1st edn, WW Norton & Co Inc 2013)

representatives. The gratification derived from likes and shares replaces the rigour of sustained involvement. Thus, the satisfaction of being seen as active substitutes the obligation to act.

To understand the efficacy of digital campaigns, it is vital to analyse their real-world outcomes. Movements like #FarmersProtest gained international attention and forced government-level negotiations. Yet, others like Save Aarey Forest or #JusticeForSSR saw a surge in online outrage but limited institutional accountability. The difference lies in the organisational backbone behind these campaigns and the level of offline mobilisation. Without pressure on the ground, digital movements often fizzle out once the online momentum wanes.

Media sensationalism and algorithmic bias further distort the landscape of activism.[23] Mainstream media tends to cherry-pick issues that align with trending sentiments or political narratives, thereby amplifying certain causes while ignoring others of equal or greater importance. Simultaneously, social media algorithms prioritise engagement over accuracy or depth, promoting content that is provocative rather than constructive. As a result, important issues may be sidelined, and activism becomes reactionary and ephemeral.

The cumulative effect is a society where activism is confused with awareness, and awareness is reduced to optics. While digital tools have democratised the means of participation, they have also enabled a culture of instant activism, where the urgency to respond overrides the need to reflect, organise, or follow up. The challenge, therefore, lies in distinguishing symbolic support from substantive change, and in creating channels that bridge online advocacy with offline accountability.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: FROM ONLINE AWARENESS TO OFFLINE ACTION

The growing disparity between digital enthusiasm and real-world civic participation calls for an urgent recalibration of activism in India. While social media has revolutionised awareness-building and given marginalised voices a platform[24], the ultimate measure of activism lies in its ability to bring about tangible societal change. Bridging the divide between

[23] Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism (Routledge Studies in Asia's Transformations)* (Routledge 2009)
[24] Zuckerman (n 22)

online awareness and offline action is not merely desirable; it is essential for sustaining a healthy democracy.[25]

To begin with, convergence between the digital and civic spheres ensures that advocacy efforts are not isolated in cyberspace but are reflected in governance, policymaking, and ground-level transformation. Digital platforms can serve as launching pads for broader movements, but real impact occurs when awareness transitions into grassroots involvement, attending community meetings, participating in voter drives, holding local representatives accountable, or engaging in litigation and advocacy.

Influencers, educators, and civic tech platforms play a critical role in this process. Influencers who go beyond performative content and use their reach to amplify on-ground campaigns such as fundraisers, volunteer drives, and legal support initiatives contribute significantly to civic empowerment. Educators, especially at the school and college level, can integrate digital literacy with civic education, encouraging students to act beyond screens. Meanwhile, civic tech platforms like Swaraj Abhiyan, MyGov, Change.org, and Let's Vote help users file grievances, report municipal issues, and access tools for civic engagement, thereby creating a direct link between digital behaviour and real-world action.

Community-led initiatives that successfully combine both spheres offer replicable models for civic engagement. For instance, the Save Aarey Forest campaign, initially driven by social media, eventually saw citizens taking to the streets, filing legal petitions, and lobbying with local government, a powerful example of hybrid activism. Similarly, the Citizen Matters platform not only reports on urban civic issues but also organises local town halls and supports neighbourhood problem-solving, showcasing how journalism, digital participation, and civic action can intersect meaningfully.[26]

The transition from awareness to action must also be supported by an enabling legal and policy framework. Government bodies and civil society must incentivise civic participation by integrating it with institutional processes.[27] For example, introducing civic credit systems for attending public consultations, streamlining grievance redressal portals, and making Right to Information (RTI) filings digitally accessible can empower citizens to act on the

[25] Tufekci (n 1)
[26] 'About Us' (*Citizen Matters*) <https://citizenmatters.in/about> accessed 15 May 2025
[27] Rajesh Tandon and Ranjita Mohanty, *Civil Society and Governance* (Sanskriti 2002)

information they consume online.[28] Mandatory civic education modules in higher education curricula and collaborations with local bodies for internships and volunteering can further embed a culture of civic responsibility.[29]

Additionally, data-driven policymaking, informed by digital activism trends, can help the state respond more effectively to public sentiment. Institutional transparency, proactive governance, and participatory policy design will ensure that activism, whether born online or offline, finds a meaningful place in India's democratic fabric.

Ultimately, bridging the digital-civic divide demands a shift in mindset: activism must be seen not as a momentary expression but as a sustained commitment. This convergence holds the key to transforming passive observers into active citizens, digitally aware, civically engaged, and socially responsible.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The co-existence of digital activism and civic apathy in India signals the need for an integrated approach that empowers citizens both online and offline.[30] While social media has democratized information dissemination[31], its true potential will only be realised when it inspires concrete civic action. To that end, this section outlines key policy recommendations aimed at building a more participatory, informed, and civically active society.

The foundation of engaged citizenship must be laid early through structured civic education that includes both offline duties and digital rights[32]. The current civics curriculum often remains abstract, focusing on constitutional provisions without contextualising their real-world implications. A revamped educational framework should introduce students to digital civic tools (e.g., RTI applications, grievance portals, election information apps)[33] and train them to critically assess social media narratives[34]. Workshops on democratic responsibilities,

[28] 'RTI Online: A Portal for Citizens' (*RTI*) <https://rtionline.gov.in/> accessed 15 May 2025
[29] 'National Education Policy 2020' (*Ministry of Human Resource Development*) <https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf> accessed 15 May 2025
[30] Tufekci (n 1)
[31] Zuckerman (n 22)
[32] National Education Policy 2020 (n 29)
[33] RTI Online: A Portal for Citizens (n 28)
[34] Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework* (Council of Europe Report 2017)

media literacy, and fact-checking must be incorporated across disciplines, especially in social sciences and law[35].

One of the key deterrents to civic engagement is the perceived opacity and inefficiency of public institutions.[36] Many citizens view local governance bodies as inaccessible or indifferent. To combat this, it is essential to invest in digital public infrastructure that simplifies civic interaction. User-friendly platforms for public grievance redressal, transparent budgeting portals, e-governance dashboards, and localised helpline apps can foster trust.[37] Provisions under the Digital India initiative must be expanded to ensure usability and accessibility, especially for non-English speakers and rural populations.[38]

Digital engagement must not end with hashtag activism or online debates. Platforms such as MyGov have demonstrated that direct communication between the state and its citizens is possible[39]. Going forward, local governance bodies must institutionalise digital feedback mechanisms such as online townhalls, e-consultations, and participatory budgeting as standard practice. Piloting online voting systems for municipal elections or housing societies can serve as a testing ground for future electoral reforms. Public dashboards tracking the implementation of government schemes in real-time can also ensure accountability and build public trust. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) serve as critical bridges between citizens and state institutions. They must be supported to scale civic awareness campaigns, train grassroots volunteers, and facilitate legal or bureaucratic literacy. Collaborations with digital influencers and social media platforms can further amplify reach. Government campaigns like MyGov, Digital India, and Swachh Bharat should be reoriented from one-way messaging to two-way engagement models, where citizens are co-creators of public policy rather than passive recipients.

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[35] 'Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers' (*UNESCO*, 07 February 2011) <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/media-and-information-literacy-curriculum-teachers> accessed 15 May 2025

[36] Rajesh Tandon and Ranjita Mohanty, *Does Civil Society Matter?: Governance in Contemporary India* (SAGE 2003)

[37] 'E-Governance Initiatives' (*Digital India Programme*, 2023) <https://www.digitalindia.gov.in/> accessed 15 May 2025

[38] *Ibid*

[39] 'About Us' (*MyGov*) <https://www.mygov.in/> accessed 15 May 2025

CONCLUSION

India today stands at a unique crossroads, one where an unprecedented digital revolution coexists with a persistent civic inertia. This paper has explored the paradox of civic apathy and digital activism, shedding light on how the vibrancy of online expression often fails to translate into sustained, on-ground democratic engagement.[40] While social media is flooded with posts, shares, and hashtags that signal awareness and concern[41], polling booths, public hearings, and local governance forums often remain deserted. This disconnect reflects not just a behavioural pattern but a deeper systemic and psychological rift in the understanding and practice of citizenship.[42]

The study underscores that digital activism, whether in the form of movements like #MeTooIndia, #FarmersProtest, or environmental campaigns, has indeed contributed to awareness, narrative shifts, and in some cases, legal or political responses[43]. Yet, this mode of engagement is frequently limited by slacktivism, algorithmic echo chambers, and performative participation that offers instant gratification without real commitment.[44] On the other hand, civic apathy manifests in alarming ways in low voter turnout, sparse attendance at local body meetings, public disengagement from planning processes, and disillusionment with institutional efficacy.

Bridging this duality requires more than critique; it calls for a fundamental reimagining of what it means to be an active citizen in the digital age. Citizenship today is not merely a matter of rights and legal status; it is a conscious, continuous participation in the democratic process, both online and offline.[45] A responsible democracy is built not on the shoulders of a few politically vocal individuals but on the collective will of an engaged populace that holds power accountable and contributes meaningfully to public discourse and decision-making.[46]

This article has proposed that the gap between digital and civic spheres can be narrowed through an inclusive, policy-driven framework. From integrating civic education into digital

[40] Tufekci (n 1)
[41] Zuckerman (n 22)
[42] Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (Orient Blackswan 2010)
[43] *Mahua Moitra v Union of India* (2021) SCC OnLine SC 322
[44] Morozov (n 3)
[45] Sherry R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' (1969) 35(4) Journal of the American Institute of Planners 216 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225> accessed 15 May 2025
[46] Tandon (n 27)

literacy programs and making governance systems more transparent, to incentivising public participation through accessible technology, the solutions are available, but the will to implement them must follow. The involvement of influencers, educators, NGOs, and government-backed platforms is crucial in mobilising this transformation.

In closing, while India may appear to be two nations, one digitally vocal and another civically silent, the aspiration must be to unite them. The future of Indian democracy depends not just on voices raised online but on actions taken offline. The real measure of activism is not the virality of a tweet but the ripple of change it creates in the real world.[47]

Active citizenship, then, is the bridge between outrage and reform, between awareness and accountability. It is time we moved beyond the screen and stepped into the streets, the schools, the polling booths, and the panchayats, not just to demand change but to become it.

[47] Wardle (n 34)