

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q6(c)

How can you assess the significance of social movements in the digital era? Explain

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Sociological theories of power; Power elite, bureaucracy, pressure groups, and political parties; Nation, state, citizenship, democracy, civil society, ideology; Protest, agitation, social movements, collective action, revolution.

Core demand of the question

- Define social movements and what is new in the digital era
- **Assess significance:** speed, scale, **connective action**, agenda setting
- **Note limits:** slacktivism, surveillance, digital divide, fleeting publics
- Illustrate (India or comparative) without turning into a current-affairs list

Revision summary

Social movements now use platforms for recruitment, framing and witnessing.

Connective action personalises protest and lowers coordination costs.

Significance is high for speed, scale and agenda setting.

Limits include digital divide, surveillance, rumour and weak staying power.

Older resource and opportunity theories still explain durable success.

Indian protests and relief campaigns show amplification, not replacement, of the street.

Introduction

Social movements are organised, extra-institutional efforts to promote or resist change. In the digital era they recruit, frame and protest through platforms as well as streets. Manuel Castells wrote of networks of outrage and hope. The sociological task is to assess significance: what digital tools add, and what they cannot replace.

Body

What changes

Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg distinguished **connective action**, based on personalised sharing, from older collective action based on dense organisations. Hashtags lower the cost of showing up, at least online. Images travel faster than pamphlets. Diasporas, students and informal workers can coordinate across cities. Zeynep Tufekci has shown how easy mobilisation can outrun the harder work of decision-making and staying power. In India, campaigns around sexual violence, farmers' legislation, citizenship protests and disaster relief have all used phones, livestreams and WhatsApp chains. Significance is real for agenda setting, for documenting state violence, and for forming weak-tie publics that older unions never reached.

Limits of the assessment

The same infrastructure is used by rumour, hate and surveillance. A digital divide by class, gender and region means "the people online" are not the people. Slacktivism can substitute a like for a strike. Algorithms fragment publics. States and platforms can shut down the net. Resource mobilisation and political opportunity, in the older theories of McCarthy, Zald and Tilly, still decide whether a trend becomes an organisation with demands. Digital tools amplify; they do not abolish leadership, money or repression.

A balanced assessment is that the digital era has changed the **ecology** of movements-speed, visibility, personalised frames-without making organisation, risk and inequality obsolete. Significance is high for diffusion and narrative, mixed for durable institutional change.

Flow diagram

Social movements -> Digital infrastructure

Digital infrastructure -> Connective action speed scale

Digital infrastructure -> Divide surveillance slacktivism

Digital infrastructure -> Still need organisation opportunity

Conclusion

Digital media have become a normal infrastructure of contention, expanding who can speak and how fast frames spread. Their significance is greatest at the stage of mobilisation and witnessing, and weaker where long organisation and offline power are required. A movement that exists only as a feed is easy to start and easy to disperse.

Facts & figures

Connective action

Bennett and Segerberg: sharing-based mobilisation that does not always need a central organisation.

Castells on networked movements

Outrage and hope circulating in digital networks as a contemporary form of contention.

Tufekci's caution

Easy digital turnout can precede, and sometimes substitute for, organisational capacity.