

Sri Lanka: The Technology of Revolutions

Thursday 28 July 2022, by [JAYAKODY Paramie](#) (Date first published: 28 July 2022).

How the #GoHomeGota movement was fueled through tech

Two years ago, COVID-19, first a pandemic, evolved into an infodemic with the involvement of technology. Likewise, this year, we see a series of protests become one big movement with technology at the heart of it all.

Be it downloading a VPN to avoid those pesky social media bans, joining groups on Whatsapp or Telegram to coordinate supplies to protest sites, tweeting about police and military movement, or scrolling through Instagram to find protest schedules, technology is present in every nook and cranny of the massive wave of protests that has gripped our island nation.

For journalist Kris Thomas, social media apps have become a quick and easy method to stay updated on the movement. This includes messaging apps as well. “The sheer number of Facebook lives that happen at GGG is incredible,” he said.

Kris believes that technology plays a pivotal role in the protests, especially when it comes to recording and archiving the events that transpire. “The advent of technology and the access to it has made this one of the most documented people’s struggles in modern Sri Lankan history,” he noted, adding that technology has played a key role in the people’s mobilization as well, making communication more efficient. Therefore, it has become easier for people to muster both numbers and essentials required at the protest sites.

In particular, Kris drew attention towards the solar panel system and the 24/7 charging station built at GGG. “This is rudimentary public infrastructure even local authorities could not provide,” he explained.

The charging station is the main reason communication – from the site and the protestors who stay overnight – is as frequent as it is. “It would have been completely different in a different time period,” Kris added.

For Senuri Jayasinghe, who lives in Nuwara Eliya and away from the hubbub in Colombo, social media is her main medium to stay updated and show her support. “I spend most of my time on Instagram,” she told me, adding, “I follow a number of people who constantly post updates. In addition, I also use Facebook a lot, and a combination of a number of online news channels to stay updated.”

While she’s unable to always visit the protest sites, Senuri shows her support by sharing lists of essentials needed at the sites, keeping her followers updated on important news, and hashtagging as often as possible.

This is a stark contrast to anything that has happened before. “We had a 30-year-long civil war in Sri Lanka, and yet we were not as informed as much [on that]. Due to technology’s development, it now plays a vital part in the GoHomeGota movement,” she said, adding, “Even in terms of keeping

everyone informed, through technology we can keep not just the local community but the international community as well updated on what's happening. Even asking for donations and fundraising has been easier with technology. In particular, technology is helpful in countering fake news as well."

Fake news is the downside of such an extensive technological involvement. "There were instances where photos from the protests were used in direct disinformation tactics. An example would be when there were photos of the first tents that were set up at GGG, the rumors of condoms being found at the site spread on social media. This was to discredit the movement initially, and was not the only instance of such disinformation either," Kris pointed out.

Senuri noted that fake news wasn't limited to within Sri Lanka either. "There's a tendency for false narratives to go out to the international media," she said, noting that many international media outlets falsely portrayed the peaceful protests as 'violent'. "Thanks to technology, we have been able to make efforts to reach those journalists [from foreign media] and also mitigate the damage by putting out our own narratives," she added.

However, if not for technology, this movement would have had a very bleak ending, Senuri opined. "Similar to the 30-year war, certain information would have been suppressed, and a doctored narrative would have been put out to the public." The presence of technology has prevented yet another bloody event from occurring.

Technology can be a powerful weapon, and in Sri Lanka's case, one the protestors have wielded with devastating efficiency. Indeed, one must only look at the authorities' efforts to first impose a social media ban and then to install signal jammers at protest sites, to know just how big of a threat technology is.

From coordinating the masses to stand against injustice, to spreading awareness and exposing carefully-crafted webs of lies that have been in place for decades, the people's power is now stronger than ever.

"I think technology and its involvement has its advantages and disadvantages. But here in this movement, it has resulted in more good than bad," Kris concluded.

Paramie Jayakody

[*Click here*](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Chokolaate

<https://blog.chokolaate.net/the-technology-of-revolutions-how-the-gohomegota-movement-was-fueled-through-tech/>