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A NEW REBEL'S DILEMMA

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Social Media, Youth and Civil Unrest in India – A New Rebel’s Dilemma

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Abstract

Social media has received and still receiving tremendous attention as a tool of revolution since the Arab Spring. Current scholarship predicts that like youth bulge in a country, social media can bring about unrest. This paper is an attempt to expand this research agenda and also take it beyond MENA region and authoritarian regimes. Using mixed methods, author tests this proposition in a democratic setting for an Indian sample of 28 states, 4 Union Territories and 200 educated youth. The findings show that presence of social media using educated youth is not a clear threat. Online and offline surveys conducted on a sample of Indian youth also indicate that they do not consider social media a useful 'technology of revolution' which can be effectively used for mobilizing support and thereby bringing about any meaningful change. At best, social media helps in gathering support at local level like in a neighbourhood brawl.

Keywords: social media; youth bulge; civil unrest; India; mixed methods

Introduction

Youth are risky and also *at-risk* at the same time. Young males between fifteen and twenty-four years of age are an extremely vibrant category in need of intervention, surveillance, and control. Instances abound when this kind of a demographic scenario has led to severe unrest within the respective countries. It has been shown that France went through a similar demographic change before the French Revolution. So did the Arab world before the (in)famous Arab uprisings.

In recent times, many societies have experienced a disproportionate increase in their population with respect to people belonging to the age category between 15 and 24 years relative to other age categories. This is termed as “youth bulge” (Urdal 2007; 2011). Most of the post-cold war intrastate civil unrest has been witnessed in countries experiencing youth bulge. It has been robustly proven in the literature that having a huge proportion youth in the population puts a country at a higher risk of violent civil conflict (Urdal 2006, 2008; Huntington 1968; Goldstone 2001).

Young adults have been associated with both violent and non-violent forms of civil unrest. To cite, the Arab uprising was more of a non-violent protest movement, where the youth skillfully used ‘technologies of resistance’. These protesting young people faced more violence than they actually carried out themselves. Same can be said about the pro-democracy protestors in the streets of Hong Kong, in which 40% were students. The protests were non-violent and peaceful until the police crackdown started.

Violent or not, one common theme that connects all these movements in the recent decades is the use of social media. Different platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Whatsapp – have become the primary organizing mechanism of millennial revolutions. For example, Arab awakening is also referred to as Twitter/Facebook Revolution. Young protestors are constantly relying on social media platforms to build their movement and they have also been successful on many occasions.

Despite several instances when social media has aided youth movements, scholars have remained skeptic about the true nature of these ‘technologies of revolution’. Warren (2015) shows that intensity of collective violence varies spatially based on spread of communication technologies. He argues that unlike mass media, social media creates horizontal linkages due to its decentralized nature. These horizontal linkages then lead to intensification of social divides, hence, more violent conflicts. On the other hand, Shapiro and Weidmann (2015), in

their study on Iraq, find that the spread of cell phones is associated with reduced risk of civil violence.

The double jeopardy related to use and spread of social media makes any simplistic explanation inadequate. In this study, I try to delve deeper and tread an unknown path of the exacerbating or dampening effects of social media in an on-going or upcoming civil unrest. First step of mobilization for any social movement starts from grievances. Various platforms on social media have become channels to vent out grievances, reach out to like-minded people, and seek support. At the same time, it is also evident that most of this ranting does not materialize into a full-blown movement always. People keep moving from one issue to the other very fast. This study tries to analyze the causes that hinder the process of transformation of a grievance to a movement or otherwise.

Youth has a common connection with both social movements and social media. So, in this study, we try to examine the instrumental role of social media in the hands of youth. **Does the use of social media help youth to mobilize for a cause? Or is social media being only an outlet to vent out grievances which pacifies youth and hinders the process of mobilization? Does social media increase the risk factor of youth bulges in a country?**

Youth and Civil Unrest

Besides the very influential thesis produced by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler based on greed of parties in intra-state conflict, there is also an equally dominant field in political science that purports grievance and relative deprivation as main causes of such conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler 2002, 2004; Gurr 1970; Davies 1962). Even Collier (2003) emphasizes the presence of a poverty trap: poverty-war-poverty. Poor people are more easily recruited into armed conflict by promise of wage or better future which, in turn, leads to more poverty due to the destructiveness of war. Although it is difficult to extend the greed argument to low-scale civil violence like riots and protests, there are several studies that show how grievance has led to lower level violent incidents (Bodea and Elbadawi 2007).

Gurr (2000) and Tilly (1978) argues that people cannot be motivated to join a destructive civil war without the presence of perceived group differences or grievance per se. Olson (1965) found that identity to a particular social group is necessary to motivate a person to join a civil violence. Grievance theories identifies three forms of grievances which can motivate people to join a violent activity. They are relative deprivation, polarization and horizontal inequality.

However, these distinctions are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive and all of these categories of grievances apply to youth.

Urdal (2004, 2006) has found the youth bulges are significant structural determinant leading to civil conflict. Collier (2000) argues that the presence of a large population of young individuals provides a pool of recruits for rebel organizations and thereby making a country more at-risk. Gurr (1970) also argues on similar lines that educated and unemployed youth are a potential source of rebel recruits if they feel relatively deprived. Huntington's (1968) *lumpenproletariat* are those youth who are the left outs and hence, aggrieved by the inequality in the societies. Since they are the second generation of the people migrating from rural areas to the cities in search of greener pastures, their aspirations are higher than their fathers. When those aspirations are left unattended, they are easy to mobilize against the system. Large youth cohorts are easily motivated to join violent activities if they face unemployment or limited employment for educated youth, lack of openness in the political system, and over-urbanization (Huntington 1996; Goldstone 2001). Urdal (2006) specifically finds strong relationship between youth and low-intensity political violence and also with terrorism and rioting.

Social Media and Civil Unrest

Hochwald (2013) argues that higher degree of dependence on information technology and high volume of online information acquisition, sharing and control, increases the vulnerability of a country to web-based security issues. These threats are expectedly more in case developed countries due to high use of social media applications in running of the country.

Social media, no doubt, gives advantages for rebel groups to recruit, organize and participate in anti-government protests, yet these advantages are lopsided. Social media is not immune to government counter-protest tactics. Movement dependent highly on social media can suffer from lack of leadership. Since it leads to horizontal dissemination of information, it prevents from good leadership to shape up. It resembles the swarm intelligence, without any leader. This also leads to lack of strategic thinking and focus. Non-personal online leadership is difficult to generate and cannot claim loyalty which is required to sustain a movement (Hochwald 2013). Studies show that use of social media by youth and democratic participation is uncertain (Diamond 2010; Howard 2010). Bailard (2012) found that people considered to be high Internetusers are less likely to take part in democratic processes. On the other hand, Rhue and Sundararajan (2014) finds results contrary to that of Bailard. Groshek (2011) showed that

increased newspaper, television and radio diffusion led to rise in institutional national level democracy.

Breuer and Groshek (2014) argues, with respect to Arab Uprising, that social media undermined the authority of the autocratic regimes and also contributed to democratic consolidation post-revolution. Wertz, Groshek and Rochefort (2021) found in their study of 122 countries that the relationship between Internet and media diffusion is non-linear. In their dataset, countries classified as high and low socio-political instability, mobile phone diffusion was observed leading to instability which, in turn, led to democratization. For example, in Hong Kong pro-democracy protestors were able to organize wide-spread protests using Telegram, online forums and like. When Hong Kong government did not close the borders with China, around 7000 health workers went on a country wide strike (Fominaya 2022).

In United States and Europe, social media played a vital role in mobilizing supporters for anti-Lockdown or popularly known “plandemic” movement. Trump loyalists along with all other right-wing political and social factions used social media tools to spread large volumes of disinformation like it is a global “Jewish cabal,” Bill Gates, 5-G, “deep State”, etc. Even after waning out of the protests in US, video footages shared on social media platforms created new movements in various cities of Europe like London, Madrid, Berlin, etc. It is evident, to some extent, from the examples cited above that social media did play a role in either triggering a movement (Arab uprising) or sustaining an on-going one like the anti-lockdown movements in Europe and America.

Contrarily, Gerbaudo (2012) argues that social media like Twitter and Tumblr were unable to turn the sympathisers into actual occupiers during the “Occupy” movement in United States. The role these social media tools played was essentially of a choreographer for the movement. There remained a clear divide between the actual “occupiers” and “Internetoccupiers”.

The question is then how to translate the Internet movement into a real physical movement. In order to do that information dissemination, mobilization and organization via social media is not enough (Hochwald 2013). It will further require the social persuasion of the movement’s cause, broad-based support and legitimacy of the opposition group as well. In absence of these factors, social media alone cannot turn the low-risk online activism to real-life physical participation.

Many scholars researching use of social media in MENA revolutions are of the opinion that social media had a limited role to play. It was the social, economic, political and other structural causes that facilitated or led to the revolutions. Brym et. al. (2014) argues that the spread of grievances amongst the people, structural availability of protestors and pre-existing civic

associations were the key causes behind the revolutions in Arab countries in 2011-12, rather than Twitter or Facebook. Activism over social media is near to nothing compared to physical activism. To top it all, many times the social media companies themselves act as an impediment to collective action as was seen in the case of Wael Ghonim in Egypt during the revolution (Youmans and York 2012).

Times of crisis are always seen as an opportune moment for rise of social movements since crisis takes the skeleton out of democratic institutions in a country. At the same time, crisis also is a time of new innovations for grievance redressal for the general populace. Fominaya (2022) argues that mobilization processes leading to impactful outcomes during the crises periods like pro-democracy movements and Covid-19 defies many of our conventional wisdom. As was expected during the pandemic restrictions and lockdown that mobilization will happen mostly online, reality was different. There were not many useful hashtags that led to many form of protests around the world, yet world witnessed many overarching mass protests during the same period, like the Black Lives Matter (BLM). At the same time, political weaponization of misinformation was rampant (Fominaya 2022). The relationship between social media and civil unrest, although widely debated, has not reached any form of consensus. Scholars remain sceptical about the true nature of the causal mechanism that is underplay here.

Youth, Social Media and Civil Unrest

Like civil unrest, youth also has a very strong connection with social media. For some time now, more so post the Arab Uprising, scholars have been trying to connect the dots between social media, youth and civil unrest. Majority of the available literature essentially focusses on this connection in the context of Arab Spring. But, to be borne in mind that the MENA countries which experienced the uprising in the wake of 2011 are quite different from most of the other countries in the world. Hence, the generalizability of the existing studies, for example in the context of a democratic country, is debatable. Social media makes maintaining of authoritarian regimes more expensive, and influences shifting balance of power within the regime (Hochwald 2013). Hence, for Arab countries where it played a significant role in bringing about change of regime, the authoritarian institutions also facilitated this process. But a democratic regime is more open and more accommodative in nature. However, in a democratic country, intuitively one can expect that social media can be instrumental in garnering support for a cause and pressurise the government to fulfil its duties – reformative changes, rather than a complete revolutionary turnover. At the same time, there is a dearth of literature focussing on how social

media affect the psyche of people from different age-groups. This study, therefore, is an attempt to fill-up the gap in existing literature. In this paper, I extend the social media as a mobilizer literature to youth bulge and civil unrest in a democratic setting. Here, I try to test whether or not the same phenomenon that unleashed massive unrest in six MENA countries can be applicable in a democratic country like India which is currently experiencing massive youth bulge.

Protests in India

Lacina (2005) argues that some countries which are not totally rogue ones face higher risk of low-intensity conflicts than a full-blown civil war. These low-intensity political violence is only a way to create pressure for certain demands. Most of these actions are targeted at reformist outcomes rather than complete revolutionary turnover of the system. Hence, in such countries, the cost of political violence are very high and hence, political elites are ready to make concessions. India fits that example very well.

Despite the looming risk of the pandemic and a highly restrictive lockdown, India remained a hot-seat of protests during the period under review. Starting from the famous Shaheen Bagh protests in Jan 2020 to Delhi Mayors and councillors protests in Dec 2020, Indian citizens had somehow managed to stage protests for their demands even during the pandemic period. ACLED¹ data shows that in 2020 alone there have been 45966 protests and riots in India, in which southern state of Andhra Pradesh registered over 6000 events. These evidences raise questions regarding the mobilization process leading to these events. During pandemic and lockdown, how were the people of India able to mobilize? Was it mainly online social media platforms, which would be our general assumption? Or offline, which should have been highly risky given the contagion nature of the coronavirus and life risk associated with it? These and many other questions directs us to revisit the popular theme of ‘Technologies of Revolution’. Following are the three hypotheses tested in this paper:

H1: High number of educated youth in a country, increases its risk of experiencing civil unrest (riots and protests). (Youth Bulge)

¹ ACLED – Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

H2:

A: High number of Internetuser indicates higher chances of civil unrest (riots and protests) in a country. (Technologies of Revolution)

B: Increasing social media usage amongst youth, increases chances of civil unrest (riots and protests). (Technologies of Revolution)

Data Analysis

In this study, the dependent variable, civil unrest, is operationalized as *Incidence Rate of Riots and Protests* in Indian states for the period 2011-2021. Data on riots and protests are taken from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in India available on their website. The two most important explanatory variables for this study are – *youth bulge* and *social media*. Youth bulge is operationalized here using two separate measures – percentage of youth (age group 15-24) in the total population and gross enrolment of youth in higher education. First measure has been used to capture the effect of youth bulge in general. Second measure stratifies the sample further into educated youth. History of social movements tell us that it has always been the middle-class intelligentsia which led the revolutions, created awareness, mobilized the aggrieved people, etc. Therefore, we wanted to see if this phenomenon still holds. Data on youth bulge is taken from population statistics available on Indiastat database. For gross enrolment of youth in higher education, data is taken AISHE² Reports of Ministry of Education, Government of India. Social media variable is measured as number of Internetusers (in million) in a state for the period under analysis. Data for this variable is taken from Annual Publications of TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India). Hypothetically, as the number of Internetusers increase, the risk of civil unrest should also increase.

For robustness check of the results, I use a battery of parameters as control variables – lagged dependent variable, state GDP per capita, log of Muslim population in the states and unemployment rate in the states. Literature shows that there is a general tendency of certain countries/states to riot/protest if they have a history of such events. Past experiences create a repertoire of successful action (Tilly 1978). People living in poor states are more likely to suffer from relative deprivation, hence, more likely to create civil unrests. Log of state GDP per capita is used to measure wealth of a state. Poorer states are more risk-prone. In India, post-

² All India Survey of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

independence, most common form of civil violence has been communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. Hence, a natural control for percentage of Muslim population in a state has been included. States with a substantial proportion of Muslims compared to Hindus are hypothesized to experience more civil unrest. This is in line with the Ethnic Dominance thesis, which is better predictor of civil violence compared to Ethnic Fragmentation (Fearon 2003). High unemployment is indicative of extremely low opportunity cost for youth. At the same time, they are aggrieved due to lack of employment opportunities. Therefore, they have both opportunity and willingness to create ruckus. Data on control variables are taken from Indiastat database.

The dataset for this study consists of 28 states and 4 union territories. Jammu & Kashmir has not been included due to its unstable political climate. The dependent variable in this study is event count data. Hence, negative binomial estimation technique has been used for data analysis. Random effects model over fixed effect models was chosen since null hypothesis under Hausman test could not be rejected. There are also two other reasons for choosing random effects model: one, random effect model requires that the effects at the group level and independent variables are uncorrelated to get unbiased estimates. Random effects assume both within-and-between group variation unlike fixed effect which uses only within-group variation. Second, due to relatively small time variation of this study (11 years, 2011-2021), it is possible for all within-unit effects to diverge from the true effects in the same direction. Given these conditions, the estimate of β in fixed effects model can be quite different from the true β . Therefore, to have efficient and consistent estimates, I used negative binomial regression with random effects. Results from this regression are reported in Table 1 and 2.

Technologies of Revolution

Table 1 reports the results from cross-sectional analysis. In both column (1) and (3), one observes that the chief explanatory variables in this study, i.e., educated youth and percentage of youth population, are only significant when no controls are included and also are in different directions. Coefficients in Col. (1) and (3) shows that high proportion of youth in higher education can be a point of concern but high percentage of youth (educated or not) in total population is a blessing. However, both of these variables loose significance when we control for other factors.

Interestingly, high volume of Internet users mitigates chances of civil unrest as reflected from the results in Col. (2) and (3). This, in a way, contradicts the “Technologies of Revolution’ thesis, i.e., Internet/social media helps in mobilization for a cause (H2a). Results here shows

that if more number of people use Internet/social media, they become less pre-disposed towards mobilizing for any upheaval. This also supports my argument that nowadays Internet creates a dampening effect on mobilization for a cause. People prefer to vent out over social media platforms rather than physically join any movement. However, the interaction term between youth population and Internet user is positive and significant corroborating 'technologies of revolution' thesis. But it is not a robust predictor as seen in Table 1, Col. 3 & 4.

When a protest movement relies heavily on social media, it makes monitoring easier for government and thereby, influence the online content (Hochwald 2013). This leads potential protesters move away from the heated debates to areas of lesser concern, hence reducing the impact of the movement. Many times, government asks Facebook and other social media platforms to ban certain pages with controversial matters, or completely shut down Internet services as we observed in Jammu & Kashmir post abrogation of Article 370. This, to some extent, explains why we did not find Internet usage as a robust predictor of unrest.

All other control variables used for robustness check are significant and in their expected direction. Past events of unrest creates a repertoire of successful events, poor states more likely to experience unrest and high proportion of Muslim population in a state increases risks of civil unrest. However, variable measuring unemployment rate is significantly negative in all model specifications (Col. 2 & 4). This indicates lower the unemployment rate, higher the chance of unrest. This is contrary to previous literature, which predicts that higher unemployment should lead to severe discontentment amongst people, thereby increasing chances of unrest.

Table 1: Cross-Sectional Analysis without J&K				
Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Youth in HE</i>	0.025* (0.014)	0.021 (0.015)		
<i>Youth Pop (%)</i>			-0.704*** (0.079)	-0.039 (0.153)
<i>Internet Users</i>	0.006 (0.014)	-0.016** (0.008)	-0.301*** (0.062)	-0.111 (0.070)
<i>Interaction 1 (youth in HE*Internet users)</i>	-0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)		
<i>Interaction 2 (youth pop*Internet users)</i>			0.017*** (0.003)	0.005 (0.004)
<i>Lag Events</i>		0.000*** (0.000)		0.000*** (0.000)
<i>State GDPpc</i>		-0.675** (0.219)		-0.226 (0.201)
<i>Muslim</i>		0.164** (0.063)		0.171** (0.080)
<i>Unemployment</i>		-0.009** (0.003)		-0.008** (0.004)
<i>Constant</i>	-3.289*** (0.324)	12.221*** (2.684)	8.476*** (1.248)	8.278** (3.404)
N	186	101	186	101

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$

The results from state-level analysis using panel data are reported in Table 2. Col. (1) and (2) of Table 2 shows contradictory results about youth in higher education and civil unrest. In Col. 1, we find that educated youth are significantly not a threat to internal stability of a state. On the other hand, when we control for other factors, it shows positive and significant relation to civil unrest (Col.2). Hence, it is difficult to conclude if lot of educated youth in a state is a risk or not. Same can be said about percentage of youth in total population of the state. Higher the percentage, greater the risk (Col 3). But when we control for other factors, it is no longer a significant factor in predicting unrest. Therefore, it will be wrong to pin-point youth or even educated youth as a threat to internal stability of any state.

Nevertheless, when we combine these variables with Internet, the mixture can be combustible. Both the interaction terms in Col. (1) and (3) are positively and significantly related to civil unrest. This indicates that if a state has high proportion of educated youth in the population who are Internet users, the chances of unrest increases significantly. To be noted, this relationship is not robust to other model specifications (Col. 2 and 4), hence should not be overrated. Other control variables, past events, state GDP per capita, percentage of Muslim population are all significant and shows expected relationship with unrest.

At state-level, unemployment is positive and significant, indicating high unemployment rate means higher risk. This is supported in the literature, since higher unemployment means more broken promises and broken dreams. Employment is something that every youth aspires for. Hence, high unemployment rate in the state creates a negative environment for the youth and no hope for a better future making the youth more vulnerable. In this scenario, does the youth only vent their grievances over Internet and wait for some miracle to happen or they take charge in their own hands is not so clear from the results here. When we control for unemployment rate (Col. 2 and 4), both the interaction terms (youth x internet) lose significance and also change direction. Hence, whether youth of India considers Internet and social media really as a 'technology of revolution' or is social media really a 'technology of revolution' is unclear and warrants more attention.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Youth in HE</i>	-0.070*** (0.009)	0.045** (0.015)		
<i>Youth Pop (%)</i>			1.073*** (0.141)	0.536 (0.403)
<i>Internet Users</i>	-0.012** (0.005)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.109** (0.039)	0.003 (0.034)
<i>Interaction 1 (youth in HE*Internetusers)</i>	0.005** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)		
<i>Interaction 2 (youth pop*Internetusers)</i>			0.006** (0.002)	-0.000 (0.002)
<i>Lag Events</i>		0.000*** (8.009)		0.000** (0.000)
<i>State GDPpc</i>		-3.062*** (0.326)		-2.110*** (0.313)
<i>Muslim</i>		0.214** (0.115)		-0.106 (0.228)
<i>Unemployment</i>		0.009*** (0.002)		0.009*** (0.002)
<i>Constant</i>	3.071*** (0.264)	31.460*** (3.930)	-15.827*** (2.273)	18.065** (6.482)
<i>N</i>	186	101	186	101
<i>Hausman Chi-sq</i>	2.91			
<i>p-Value</i>	0.233			

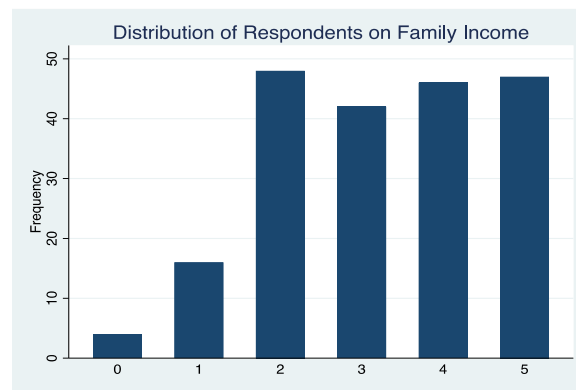
*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$

Survey Results

In order to add more credence to the quantitative analysis presented above, we conducted a survey to check the ground realities. This survey was conducted by public policy students of Policy Research Lab, School of Government and Public Policy, O.P. Jindal University. A

structured questionnaire was distributed, both online and offline, to educated youth pan-India (Refer to Appendix 1). Total number of respondents crossed 200 for this survey. Most of the respondents belong to the age group of 15-24 (85%). Majority of the respondents are Hindu (74%) and belong to OBC (18%) and General (74%) caste category. Gender-wise, male are 52% (109 out of 208) and female are 46% (97 out of 208). Family Income of most of the respondents fall between 1-20 Lakhs INR (Fig. 1) and belong to families with educated parents.

Fig 1: Family Income of Respondents



Recall the null hypothesis of this study that young individuals are more likely to express their grievances over social media platforms with an aim to gather support and mobilise for a cause. As is evident from Table 3, about 72% of the respondents in our survey rarely or never express any grievance over social media platforms. Pearson chi-sq test of independence did not establish a statistically significant relationship between these two variables – age and expressing grievance on social media [$\chi^2(1, 208) = 4.51, p < .34$]. These findings defies the argument that educated youth are more likely to use social media for expressing grievance and thereby mobilizing for any civil unrest (H2b). This is also in-line with our findings from the quantitative analysis presented above.

Table 3: Relationship between Age and Expressing Grievance on Social Media

Age	No comments	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
15-24 yrs	2	8	35	74	58	177
25-29 yrs	0	3	9	8	11	31
Total	2	11	44	82	69	208

In order to probe further, we asked another follow-up question to the respondents – *For which issues, you will prefer to use social media platforms to express grievance?* This was a closed-ended question. Issues listed were – individual issues, concerns related to basic provisions, political issues, global issues, social issues and other. Results are reported in table 4 below.

Table 4: Issues of interest to youth in India

Age	Others	Individual	Basic Provision	Political Issues	Social Issues	Global Issues	Total
15-24	36	40	19	23	40	15	173
25-29	5	6	7	3	5	5	31
Total	41	46	26	26	45	20	204

As table 4 shows, that most of the respondents (45%) preferred to express concern regarding individual issues or social issues like animal rights, women empowerment, caste discrimination, LGBTQ issues, etc. Only 12% of the respondents prefer to share any opinion/concern about political issues, like rise of Congress, right revival, opposition alliance, third front, etc. over the internet. Even for 67% of our respondents (80 out of 207) who consider themselves as medium-high social media user, they would rarely to never use social media to express their discontent. Also, the issues that they choose to voice their opinion are mostly apolitical in nature. Success rate of achieving something by mobilising via social media also significantly do not motivate youth. About 96% of the responding youth said that they think that social media *moderately* helps as a mobilizing mechanism.

Interestingly, gender showed a more significant relationship with expressing grievance over social media [$\chi^2(1, 204) = 20.87, p < .01$] compared to age. It was observed that young girls are more active over social media for expressing their concerns regarding individual (65%) and social (57%) issues than their male counterpart. However, they also do not prefer to comment on political issues.

The ways of expression amongst today's youth is to share publicly (19%), like a post (16%) or do nothing (19%). Apparently, these young boys and girls have completely shut themselves up from making any public comment by *creating a post*. Education, family income, religion, caste nothing seems to matter for encouraging youth to express their discontent publicly. Nobody wants to bell the cat.

We had asked them a set of questions to test the feeling thermometer regarding social media platforms as mobilizing tool. As seen in Table 5, overall youth in India does consider social

media as an useful tool to bring about any change. About 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media is a tool for bringing about change but that cannot be achieved by only expressing grievance in public domain (Q2). In the very next question (Q3) 35% of the youth said that they would prefer to rant on social media rather than physically join a protest. Almost half of the youth surveyed (45%) does not feel happy by sharing any of their concerns on social media platforms, nor does it add any value to their lives (80%). As evident from this feeling thermometer, social media has kind of lost its value to youth for constructive purposes. They mostly use these platforms for entertainment purpose. The whole idea of social media as a “Technology of Revolution” seems to have lost its lustre amongst Indian youth.

Table 5: Feeling Thermometer regarding Social Media amongst Youth

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Running a viral (wide-reaching) campaign on social media is enough for bringing about a social change/ addressing an issue.	10	79	23	75	18
No definite change can be brought about through social media alone. Social media is just a tool in bringing about any change.	48	99	26	27	4
I prefer sharing/resharing, tweets or posts on social media compared to physically going for a protest.	18	55	69	44	18
Social media promotes herd behaviour/mob mentality ; where users only engage with people/posts that agree with their views	61	69	42	25	8
Expressing my grievances/ discontent or opinions on social media makes me feel happy/ content.	8	43	59	69	25
Expressing my grievances/ discontent or sharing my opinions on social media adds value to my life.	9	24	66	60	43

Conclusion

Around eight people in different parts of the country were arrested in June 2019 for targeting political leaders in their social media posts. Prashant Kanojia’s comments, a Delhi-based journalist, about Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath created an uproar in Twitter for which he was arrested two days later. Disha Ravi, a 22-year old climate activist, was charged with sedition for sharing online handbook to raise support for farmer’s protests on Twitter. These and many other similar examples have drove home a sense of fear that anyone from anywhere can be charged for their social media posts on grounds of sedition.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses presented in this paper reveal that youth do not treat social media as a ‘technology of revolution’ and an important component of mobilization. Nowadays, young boys and girls use social media platforms for entertainment, online shopping and, to some extent, other information. It was further revealed during the face-to-face surveys conducted by the student surveyors of JSGP Policy Research Lab. During our fieldwork, some of the respondents shared that they use *whatsapp* to gather and mobilize people sometimes. In such cases, the issue at stake are mostly local brawls, increasing hostel fees, teacher absenteeism in colleges, etc. One of the respondents said that even during the protests against CAA/NRC, students of her campus kept their voices restricted within the campus only. No-one from her college was willing to join the protesters at Shaheen Bagh nor were they ready to make any public comment.

The favourite social media platform for youth today is *Instagram*. About 26% of our respondents chose it as their most preferred site. Only 2% of respondents chose *Twitter* and 10% chose Facebook as their first choice. Twitter is a microblogging site, where one is expected to express their opinion regarding various economic and socio-political issues. Also on Facebook, one can create posts regarding contentious issues and try to gather support around it. However, today young individuals are more busy making mindless reels and gathering likes. Nonetheless, it will be too harsh to completely negate the role of social media as a mobilizing tool. There are other factors at play for the confounding results reported in this paper. Many a times, the political climate of an existing regime affects such behaviour. In a more open country, which scores high on democracy scale, we might encounter different results. Lately, India has not been performing well on any of these scales. V-Dem has already called India a *semi-autocratic* country. According to Worldwide Governance Indicators 2021, India ranks 51 on Voice and Accountability, which is 10-points lower than what it was ten years back. If we ran the same survey in a country with a rank closer to 100, we might observe different phenomenon. Therefore, rather than shutting down social media’s usefulness as mobilizing tool, more thinking can be directed to make it worthy.

Another important finding from this study is the role of youth in inciting civil unrest. I did not find any significant and robust results in support of H1 of this paper. As per the results presented here, there is no reason to believe that young adults, educated or not, are a threat to internal stability in any country. There should be more interactive factors, like lack of educational and employment opportunities, poor health conditions, high regime repression, etc. that makes youth dangerous.

Both social media and youth can improve governance in various ways. Rather than targeting them as threat, governments can put them to use for more productive purposes. Social media could help government to create self-governing capabilities within the government, promote networking and collaboration with external groups, improve decision-making speed, etc. and also as a manipulation device to stop violence (Hochwald 2013). For instance, civic volunteers, many of them veterans of pro-democracy movement were able to connect using their old social media network and help government, like distribute masks, hand sanitizers, maps showing tracing and testing, etc. during the pandemic in Hong Kong.

Taiwan's response to pandemic using open sources for policy participation is a wonderful example on how to make best use of Internet and social media (Fominaya 2022). Taiwan Minister of Digital Affairs spearheaded the *g0v* ("*gov zero*") tools for civic innovation, including *Taiwan* and *Join* platforms. Health Minister Audrey Tang along with her collaborators designed a humour-based counter disinformation to combat "*rumour with humour*". Memes were used to disseminate all information and contain disinformation related to public health. Taiwanese successful response to Covid-19 was due to the deeply integrated digital democracy depending on civil tech innovations through the open source "hacker ethic" of the movement. Proliferation of similar initiatives in developing world is most welcome.

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Appendix I

Survey Questionnaire

Participant Information Sheet

Name of the Study: *Social Media and Youth in India*

Principal Investigator (PI): Swetasree Ghosh Roy

Status of the PI: Professor

Contact details of PI: swetasree@jgu.edu.in

The purpose of this study is to understand the usage of social media platforms for sharing opinion(s) and venting of grievances by youth (aged 15-29 years) in India. The results of this study may also be published in suitable academic journals and print media, which may be available to the general public.

Your contribution to this research involves providing information about your social media usage patterns. You can withdraw from this interview without any penalty at any time by informing the investigator of this decision. The information you provided will be used solely for the purpose stated above. The information provided by you will be suitably anonymised by removing individual identifiers.

This study has been reviewed by, and has received ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) of O.P. Jindal Global University. If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the investigator and he/she will do his/her best to address that concern. Even after this If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact

Prof. Swetasree Ghosh Roy
JSGP Policy Research Lab
Jindal School of Government and Public Policy
O.P. Jindal Global University Sonapat, HR 131001

This interview will take approximately 10-15 minutes. We thank you in advance for your time and attention. Your contribution to this study is highly valued and greatly appreciated.

Participant Consent Form

I hereby declare that

1. The contents of the participant information sheet have been explained to me in my own language and I have understood it.
2. I had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications about the study and they have been satisfactorily answered.
3. I understand that I may withdraw from this interview without any penalty at any time by informing the researcher of this decision.
4. I understand that this study has been reviewed by and has received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) of O.P. Jindal Global University.
5. I understand that data will be suitably anonymised to remove all personal identifiers.
6. I understand that the results of this research will be written up as a report, policy briefs, journal papers, etc.
7. I understand that the results of this study may be published in journals that might be available for every internet user.
8. I understand how to raise a concern, if I have any and how to make a complaint.

I hereby agree to participate in this research of my own free will.

Name of the Participant

Signature/ left thumb print of the Participant

Date/Place

Name of the Researcher

Signature of the researcher

Date/Place

Social Media and Youth in India

SurveyID/ Response ID - _____

1. Which age-group do you belong to?

- a. 15-24 years
- b. 25-29 years

2. Gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Others _____
- d. Prefer not to say

3. Marital status?

- a. Single
- b. Married
- c. Separated
- d. Divorced
- e. Other _____

4. Profession?

- a. Student not seeking employment
- b. Student seeking / doing part time employment
- c. Fully employed
- d. Part time employed
- e. Unemployed
- f. Homemaker/ Housewife
- g. Others

4.a. If employed, which sector are you employed in?

- a. Private sector (corporate, NGO etc.)
- b. Government sector
- c. Self-employed (gig, vendors, business, merchants)
- d. Others

5. What is your current/most recent educational qualification ?

- a. 10th Board
- b. High School/+2 Level
- c. High school +3 / Vocational training
- d. Bachelor's degree
- e. Master's Degree
- f. Not applicable

6. What kind of educational institution did you attend/are currently attending?

- a. Government Funded
- b. Semi-Autonomous
- c. Private (Deemed to be University)
- d. Private Funded

7. What is your hometown and state?

7.a. What is the current city of your residence?

7.b. How long have you lived in the current city of your residence?

8. Are your parents educated?

- a. At least one parent has post-graduate degrees
- b. At least one parent has a bachelor's degree
- c. At least one parent has completed +2 level
- d. At least one parent has completed school level
- e. At least one parent has some schooling.
- f. None of them have been to school.

9. What is your average annual family income?

- a. Less than 1 lakh
- b. Between 1-5 lakh
- c. Between 5-10 lakh
- d. Between 10-20 lakh
- e. Above 20 lakh

10. What is your religion?

- a. Hinduism
- b. Islam
- c. Christianity
- d. Sikhism
- e. Jainism
- f. Buddhism
- g. Zoroastrianism
- h. Others
- i. Atheist
- j. Prefer not say

11. What is your caste group?

- a. Scheduled Castes (SC)
- b. Scheduled Tribes (ST)
- c. Other Backward Classes (OBC)
- e. General (OC)
- f. Prefer not to say

12. Think of 5-10 of your close friends, please mark how many of them are (mention number of friends or mark NA)

- a. From caste other than yours
- b. From religious community other than yours
- c. Boys/Girls
- d. Don't know/Not applicable

13. Select the categories on which you have an opinion (multiple answers can be selected)

- a. **Health related** (Covid – cost of medicines – access to hospitals – fee charged by hospitals)
- b. **Social Issues** (Caste discrimination – Women rights – LGBTQIA+ - Animal rights – Floods in *Pakistan and Bengaluru - release of Bilkis Banu rape case convicts etc.*)
- c. **National Politics/Party politics** (*Opinion on party politics;BJP,Congress,AAP - Nationalism -*

State wise/local political issues)

d. **Global issues** (*Black lives matter - war in Ukraine - US elections - Taliban's comeback in Afghanistan - Sri Lankan crisis - Climate Change - death of Queen Elizabeth II and subsequent debate on colonialism etc.*)

e. **Bollywood** (*Boycott culture - Nepotism - Cancel culture etc.*)

f. **Economic issues** (*State of economy - Inflation - Price rise - Unemployment*)

g. **College politics** (*college elections - student administration issues*)

I. **Others issues** - _____

14. Are you affiliated/supporter of any political party?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

14. a. Which political party are you affiliated to/ support? _____

15. Rate yourself as a social-media user? On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not at all and 5 being always), how would you rate yourself as a social-media user?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Moderate		Frequent

16. On average, how much time do you spend on social media apps on a daily basis?

- a. Less than 1 hour
- b. 1-2 hours
- c. 2-3 hours
- d. More than 3 hours

17. What makes up most of the time of your social media usage? (Rank them based on your preference.)

- a. Entertainment- _____
- b. Education - _____
- c. Online Shopping- _____
- d. News - _____
- e. Expressing grievances/ discontent - _____
- f. Talking to friends and family - _____
- g. Sharing your opinions on trending issues - _____

18. Which of the following social media platforms do you primarily use for either expressing grievances/ discontent or sharing your opinions on trending issues ? (can choose multiple options)

- a. Facebook - _____
- b. Twitter - _____
- c. WhatsApp - _____
- d. Instagram - _____
- e. Telegram - _____
- f. YouTube - _____
- g. Others - _____
- h. Do not use social media for expressing grievances/ discontent or sharing opinions on trending issues - _____

19. Given below are a few statements, please answer whether you agree or disagree with them ?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided/ No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Running a viral (wide-reaching) campaign on social media is enough for bringing about a social change/ addressing an issue	1	2	3	4	5
b. No definite change can be brought about through social media alone. Social media is just a tool in bringing about any change.	1	2	3	4	5
c. I prefer sharing/resharing, tweets or posts on social media compared to physically going for a protest.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Social media promotes herd behavior/mob mentality ; where users only engage with people/posts that agree with their views	1	2	3	4	5
e. Social media is a safe space to share your opinions/thoughts	1	2	3	4	5
f. Expressing my grievances/ discontent or opinions on social media makes me feel happy/content. (calming effect)	1	2	3	4	5
g. Expressing my grievances/ discontent or sharing my opinions on social media adds value to my life. (calming effect)	1	2	3	4	5

20. How many times, in the last 6 months , have you used social media to express your grievances/ discontent or share your opinion on trending issues?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

21. If you chose any of the first three options in Q. 20, what kind of issues would you used social media for expressing your grievances/ discontent or share your thoughts on ? (Check all that applies).

- a. Individual issues (personal psycho-social issues, family issues, etc.)
- b. Issues pertaining to provision of basic public services viz water, road, electricity, garbage collection, street lights etc. in your locality or education, employment, health, pollution etc.)
- c. Political issues in your city/state/country
- d. Social issues in your city/state/country
- e. Global issues
- f. Others _____

22. How do you generally express your grievances or share your opinions on trending issues on social media platforms? [check all that applies]

- a. Create a post/tweet
- b. Share a post/tweet on your feed - publicly
- c. Share a post/tweet - among your friends (dm/pm)
- d. Reply to the responses
- e. Reply to the initial post/tweet

- f. Like a post
- g. Share a story
- h. None

23. While using social media how often do you come across content that does not align with your views/interests/ opinions ?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

24. What do you seek to achieve by venting your grievances or sharing your opinions on social media?

- a. Rally support for your issue from close ones - friends/family
- b. To spread awareness and generate a discussion in the society
- c. Grievance redressal by the concerned authority
- d. To mobilize people (both online or offline) for a cause
- f. Others - _____

26. How **successful** have you been in mobilizing support for a cause using social media in the last recent times ?

- a. Many times
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

27. Recently, How often have you been **able to bring a change** by using social media as your mobilizing tool?

- a. Many times
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

27.a. If successful in bringing about a change, at which level were you able to bring a change?

- a. Individual level
- b. Local / community Level
- c. Country level
- d. Global level
- e. Not applicable

28. On a scale of 0-5 (0 being not at all and 5 being absolutely), would you say that social media is a great tool for mobilizing support for a cause?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Moderate		Frequent