

Social Media And Identity Politics In Northeast India: Analyzing How Social Media Platforms Are Shaping Public Discourse, Identity Politics, And Social Movements In The Region.

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Citation: Dr. Manglien Gangte, et.al (2024). Social Media And Identity Politics In Northeast India: Analyzing How Social Media Platforms Are Shaping Public Discourse, Identity Politics, And Social Movements In The Region., *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1) **7721-7728**
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.10909

ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Social media has become a strong force in terms of public discourse, identity politics, and social movement. They are important arenas in Northeast India where individuals and communities can establish identities, pursue rights and political negotiations. The study expounds on the identity politics in the region and how social media has affected it basing on how it has been used in political participation, social mobilization and creation of identity. The study relies on both quantitative and qualitative data collected through interviews, surveys, and literature review, content analysis, etc., providing an analysis of the overlap between digital discourse and local social processes. The observation shows that social media provides strength to marginalized voices, Divides, and improves political participation and uproots hierarchies, and this would have a substantial future role in policy-making and grass-root movements in Northeast India.

Keywords: Social Media, Identity Politics, Public Discourse, Social Movements, Northeast India and Political Participation.

Introduction:

Social media platforms have significantly impacted public discourse in Northeast India by providing new avenues for political engagement and cultural expression. The region, known for its ethnic diversity and political unrest, has seen increasing use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, particularly among younger generations who are seeking to engage in democratic processes and express regional concerns.¹ These platforms have allowed people to circumvent the often controlled and limited reach of traditional media outlets, giving local issues greater visibility. Social media has proven to be an essential tool for activists and regional political movements, particularly in the context of ethnic identity struggles. For example, in the case of the Bodo community, social media became an essential tool in organizing protests and advocating for their political demands (Ghosh, 2005, p. 85).² Platforms allow these communities to build networks, share grievances, and mobilize support across borders. However, social media also poses challenges, such as the rapid spread of misinformation and incitement to violence, particularly in a region prone to ethnic and political tension. Unverified news often circulates rapidly, exacerbating conflict and contributing to divisions (Neog & Sarma, 2018, p. 30).³ Despite these challenges, social media platforms have empowered marginalized groups and provided a stage for more inclusive political participation. The potential for social media to influence elections, spark civil protests, and inform public opinion has reshaped how politics functions in Northeast India, making it more immediate, interactive, and decentralized.

¹. Baruah, S. (2009). *Durabale disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India*. Oxford University Press. P.120.

². Ghosh, S. (2005). *Ethnic mobilization and political change in Northeast India: A study of the Bodos and Nagas*. Cambridge University Press.

³. Neog, B., & Sarma, A. (2018). Social media and its impact on Northeast India's political discourse. *Journal of Northeast India Studies*, 8(2), 22–35.

Identity Politics in Northeast India

Identity politics in Northeast India plays a central role in shaping the region's political and social landscape. The region is marked by deep ethnic diversity, with various indigenous groups, each with their unique history and culture, asserting their identity in the face of state-led assimilation efforts. These movements are often centered around ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity and have been a powerful force in advocating for regional autonomy and greater representation.⁴ Identity politics have emerged in Northeast India due to historical resentments such as the marginalization of the people of the northeast and external political control. Movements such as the Bodo statehood mirrors the struggle to maintain culture and ethnic identity, and this is being magnified with the aid of social media.⁵

The impact of identity politics in Northeast India extends beyond local autonomy movements. It also influences political party affiliations, voter behavior, and public opinion, as people often align themselves with political groups that reflect their ethnic and cultural identities. However, critics of identity politics argue that it can create divisions and hinder broader national unity, leading to a fragmented political landscape (Fraser, 2009, p. 76).⁶ Also, identity politics has the tendency to encourage exclusionary practices where the divisive aspects are promoted at the expense of unity. However, the impulse of the marginalized communities in Northeast India to claim their rights and save the cultural heritage is crucial to the further political discourse and course of actions.

Social Movements in Northeast India

The North East Indian social movements portray ethnic intricacy, exceptional historical encounters and social-political issues in the region. These movements are often triggered by political marginalization, culturally erosive processes, and economic disregard and proclaim indigenous identities, attack the state power, and transform internal hierarchies. Such movements as the Naga struggle have reformulated the politics of the region as they seek autonomy, cultural acknowledgment, and change in structure within the federal system of India (Baruah, 2009, p. 215).⁷ Similarly, the Bodo movement, which gained prominence in the 1980s, sought the creation of a separate state for the Bodo people in Assam. This movement is a response to the cultural and economic marginalization of the Bodo community within the broader Assamese political framework. Social media has played a crucial role in the mobilization of these movements, enabling activists to connect across borders, share resources, and amplify their calls for political change.⁸ The example of Bodo movement shows how ethnic-based mobilizations in Northeast India have accessed technology to eliminate the problem of geographic isolation. The region also has social movements that concentrate on indigenous rights and environmental justice. In Meghalaya, example indigenous peoples have opposed hydroelectric schemes which pose a threat to land and livelihoods. The movements find strength in the world environmental discourse. There has also been an increase in gender based activism where women groups are calling to be represented and protected.

The 2012 Delhi gang rape was followed by protests in the Northeast organized by organizations such as NESO and AASU. The use of social media and grassroots campaigns have increased awareness about gender-based violence and trafficking and the necessity to change the laws.⁹ Notwithstanding their successes, social movements in Northeast India continue to experience various problems such as political repression, ethnic split, and fragmentation. Many of them fail to achieve concrete results even though others attract international attention. Nevertheless they continue to play a crucial role in the regional discourse, exemplifying identity, autonomy and justice in the face of increasing modernization and globalization.

Challenges in Contemporary Society in Northeast India

Contemporary society in Northeast India faces numerous challenges, including political instability, ethnic conflict, economic underdevelopment, and environmental degradation. These challenges are often intertwined, with ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy frequently fueling political instability. The region has been home to multiple insurgencies and separatist movements, many of which stem from historical grievances related to cultural preservation, identity, and marginalization by the central government (Baruah, 2009, p. 230).¹⁰ Economic underdevelopment is another significant challenge. Despite its rich natural resources, Northeast India remains one of the least developed regions in India. Limited infrastructure, inadequate access to education and healthcare, and the outflow of skilled labor to other parts of India have hindered the region's economic progress.¹¹

⁴ . (Baruah, 2009, p. 140)

⁵ . (Ghosh, 2005, p. 98)

⁶ . Fraser, N. (2009). *Scales of Justices :Reimagining Political space in a globalizing world*. Columbia University Press. P.76.

⁷ . (Baruah, 2009, p. 215)

⁸ . (Neog & Sarma, 2018, p. 22).

⁹ . (Ghosh, 2005, p. 102)

¹⁰ . (Baruah, 2009, p. 230)

¹¹ . Sachs, J. D. (2015). *The age of sustainable development*. Columbia University Press. (See pages 112-116).

These economic disparities contribute to a sense of alienation among local populations, further exacerbating social tensions. Environmental issues also pose a serious challenge, particularly as large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams and mining operations threaten local ecosystems and indigenous livelihoods. The exploitation of natural resources without adequate consideration for local communities has led to protests and resistance movements.¹² In addition, the rise of social media has brought both opportunities and challenges. While it has enabled greater political engagement, it has also exacerbated issues such as misinformation and online hate speech, further contributing to regional divisions. These challenges necessitate a more comprehensive approach to governance that balances economic development, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Literature Review:

Although the role of social media in identity politics has been extensively studied in the international literature as well as in the general Indian setting, very little has been done that focuses on how social media has contributed to identity politics in Northeast India. The ethno-linguistic particular diversity and the complicated socio-political situation in the region require a more specific study of the influence of digital platforms on the formation of political identities and mobilizations in this situation. The study by Basu¹³ The paper has attempted to delve into the understanding of how social media is influencing ethnic nationalism in Northeast India by understanding how it is helping to create and strengthen ethnic identities, how it is being used in political debate as well as empowering the marginalized groups in the already complicated socio-political phenomenon in the region.

According Sarkar, S &, Dutta, M. (2017)¹⁴ In this paper, the author is going to look at how Facebook has influenced the formation of political identity and mobilization in Indian elections. It addresses how the platform has been used to influence political opinions, engage people to take part, and even become activists in various communities. The paper singles out the role of Facebook in the political discourse, role in local politics and the possibility of movements mobilization. It also demonstrates the role of Facebook as a means of political expression and participation especially in the election times thus shaping the voting patterns and politics in general.

A study by Choudhury (2018) discusses the role of social media in the Assam agitation and the demand for indigenous rights. It highlights how digital platforms allowed marginalized voices to be heard on a national level.¹⁵ Similarly, Baruah (2019) explores the use of Facebook and WhatsApp in political mobilization during ethnic conflicts in Manipur. These platforms have allowed for the formation of solidarity groups, enabling people from different ethnic backgrounds to come together for common causes, such as the protection of indigenous lands. In the context of Northeast India, social media's potential to challenge state power and influence governance has been well-documented by scholars like Roy (2020),¹⁶ who investigates the role of digital platforms in the recent anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protests. The study emphasizes the significant role of social media in mobilizing youth and creating pan-Indian movements, with particular attention to Northeast India.

In their study, Chakrabarti and Das¹⁷ The paper will look into the case of digital mobilization and identity politics enabled by social media in Northeast India. It accentuates the possibilities brought by online space to organize protests, frame the politics, and empower the marginalized groups by providing them with more visibility, representation, and youth-driven activism.

Methodology:

The study on "Social Media and Identity Politics in Northeast India" employs a mixed-methods approach to understand how social media platforms are shaping public discourse, identity politics, and social movements in the region. This approach combines primary data collected through interviews and surveys, with secondary data sourced from existing literature, social media content analysis, and case studies of relevant social

¹² . (Neog & Sarma, 2018, p. 25)

¹³ . Basu, A. (2015). Ethnic nationalism and the role of social media in Northeast India. *Asian Journal of Social Science and Political Studies*, 4(6), 91–105.

¹⁴ . Sarkar, S., & Dutta, M. (2017). Social media and political identity: Analyzing the role of Facebook in Indian elections. *Indian Journal of Media Studies*, 14(4), 45–58.

¹⁵ .Choudhury, S. (2018). The role of social media in indigenous rights movements in Assam. *Ethnic Studies Journal*, 34(2), 101-117.

¹⁶ . Roy, A. (2020). Digital activism in the Northeast: The anti-CAA protests. *Journal of Social Media Studies*, 12(1), 45-58.

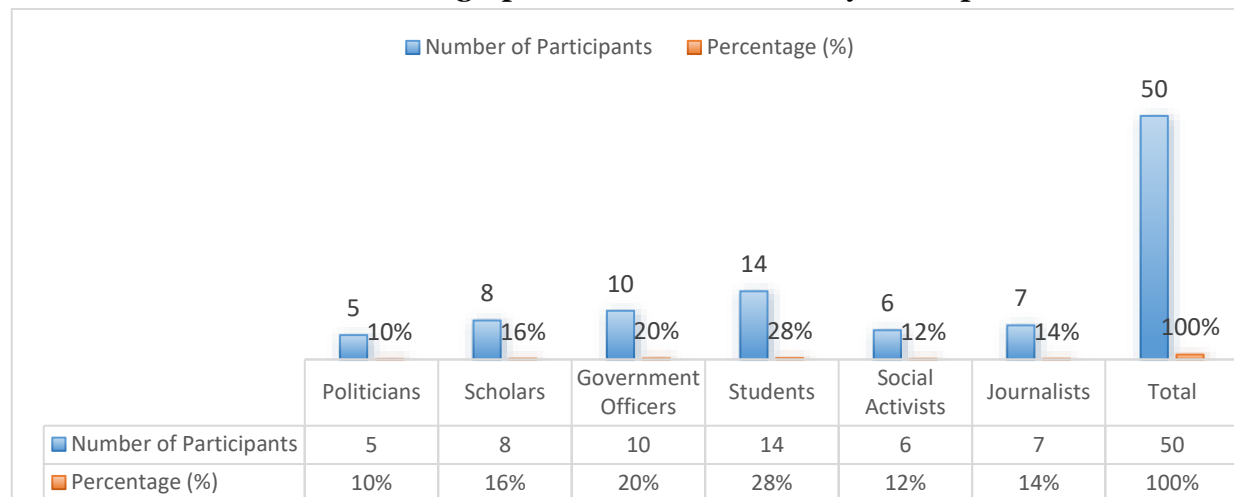
¹⁷ . Chakrabarti, S., & Das, S. (2021). Digital mobilization in Northeast India: The role of social media in identity politics. *South Asian Journal of Social Science Research*, 2(3), 12–28.

movements in Northeast India. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, the study provides a holistic view of the influence of digital platforms on identity politics in this specific region.

Primary Data Collection

The primary data collection through online surveys and interviews across various demographic groups provides insightful perspectives on the role of social media in shaping public discourse, identity politics, and social movements in Northeast India. A total of 50 participants from diverse backgrounds—politicians, scholars, government officers, students, social activists, and journalists—provided responses that were analyzed to draw conclusions about the impact and perception of social media. Below is an analysis of each table's findings.

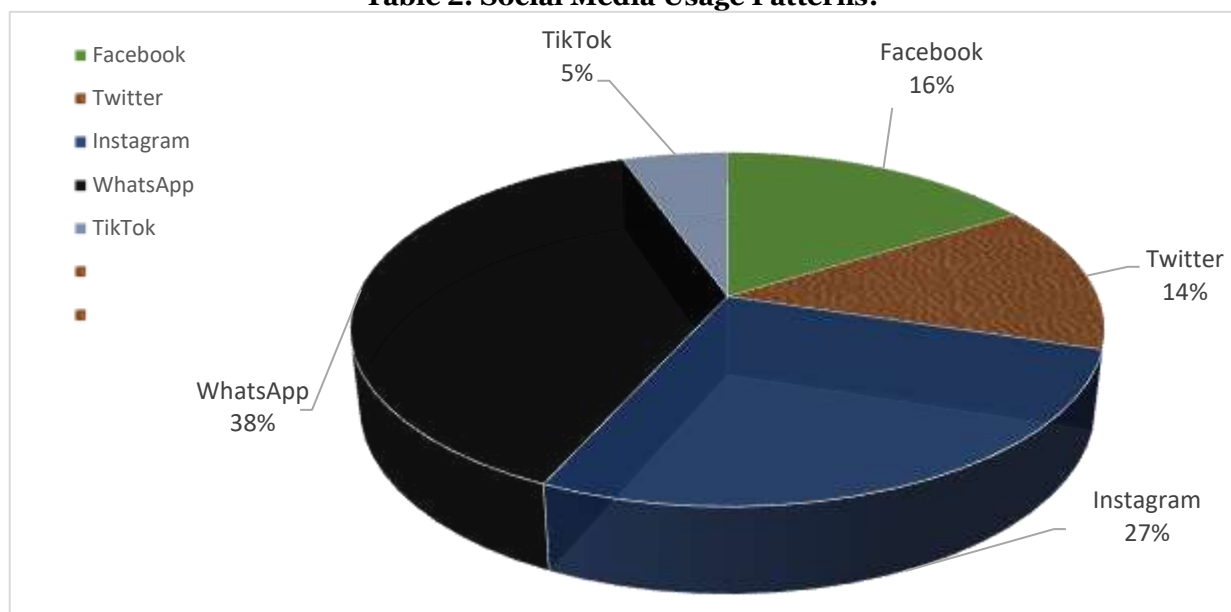
Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Survey Participants:



Source: Data collection.

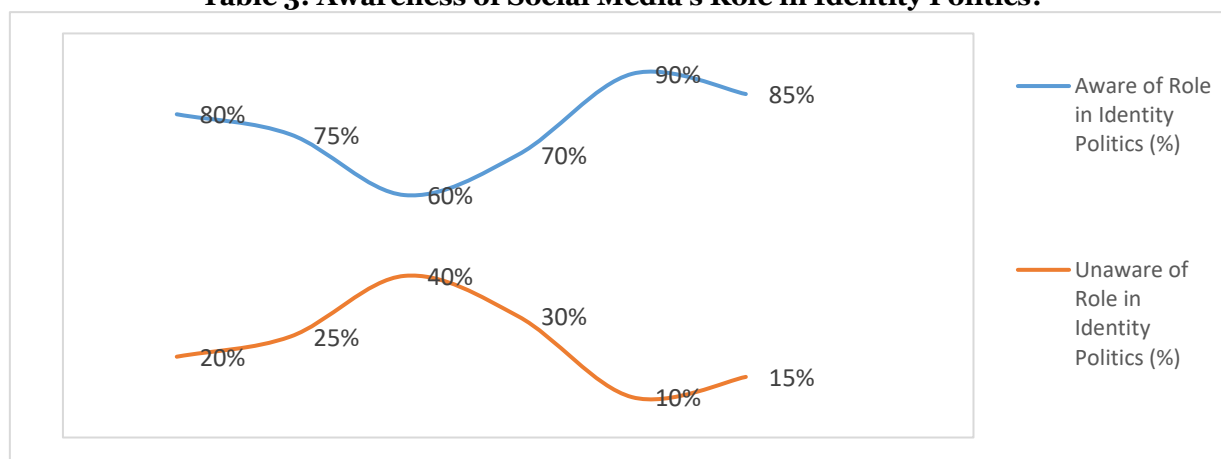
The survey respondents were divided into six distinct groups: politicians (10%), scholars (16%), government officers (20%), students (28%), social activists (12%), and journalists (14%). This distribution reveals a significant proportion of students, which aligns with the increased use of social media among younger populations. The inclusion of various groups allows for a broad understanding of how different sectors perceive social media's role in public discourse and identity politics. Notably, students make up the largest segment, indicating that their views might significantly influence how social media is shaping future generations.

Table 2: Social Media Usage Patterns:



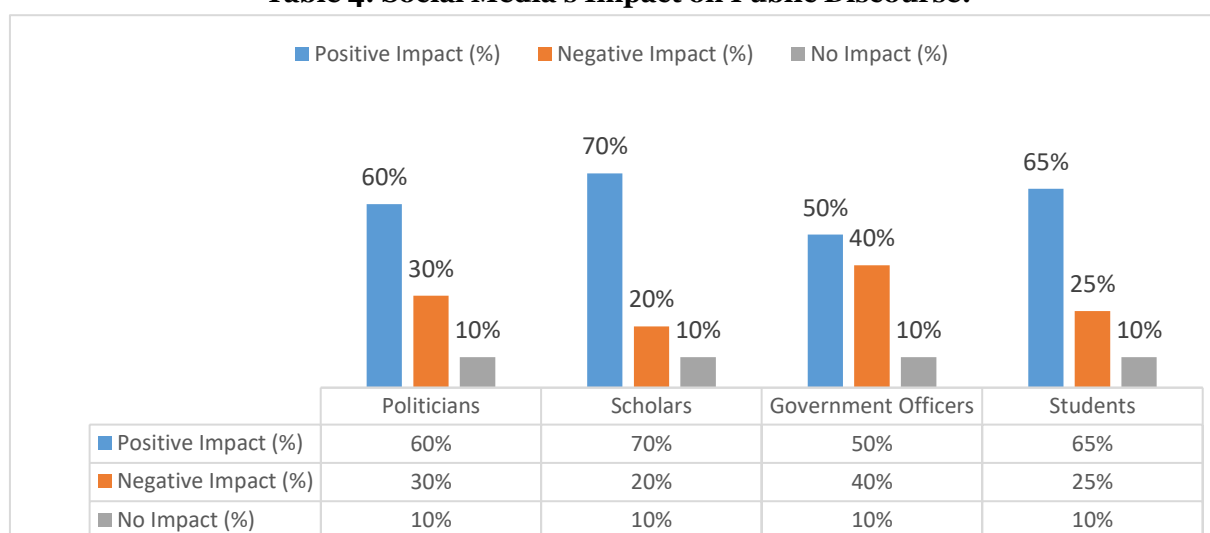
The analysis of social media frequency of use was conducted on five most popular applications, which are WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. WhatsApp was the most commonly used with 70 percent of respondents using it every day- showing how important it has become in personal, professional and political communication in India as well as the coordination of social movements. Instagram came second with half of the daily use mostly to share contents. Moderate daily usage (30% and 25%) was noted in Facebook and Twitter, indicative of their remaining role in the public arena. The app usage rate on TikTok was measured at 10 percent a day, 60 percent a week, suggesting that the app is used to consume entertainment and culture content, and not as a routine political tool or activism platform.

Table 3: Awareness of Social Media's Role in Identity Politics:

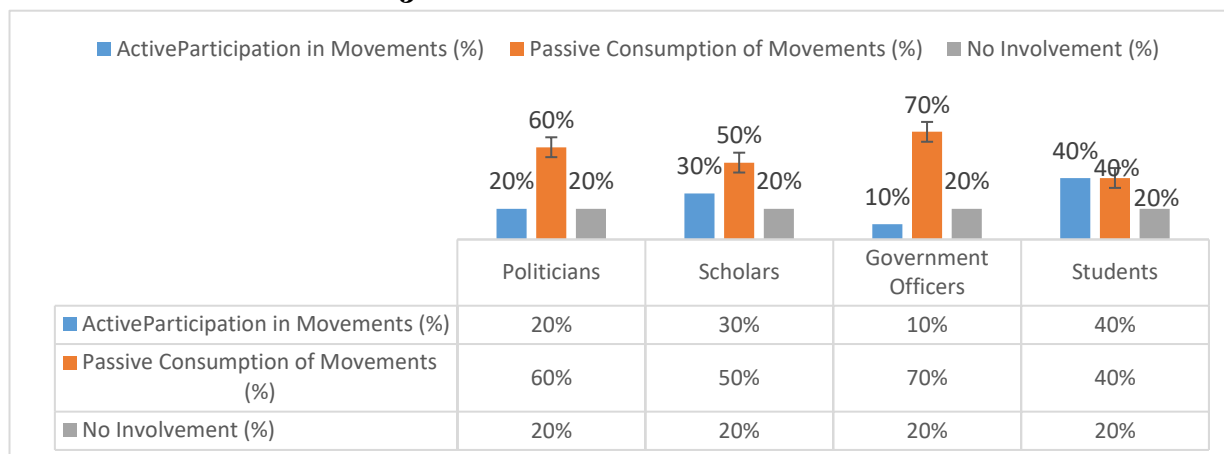


Most groups were very knowledgeable when questioned on whether they knew the involvement of social media in identity politics. The most aware were social activists (90 percent), journalists (85 percent), politicians (80 percent), and scholars (75 percent). Conversely, government officers (60%) and students (70%) were comparatively less aware, which indicates a possible loophole that may inform the way people act and a policy is enacted.

Table 4: Social Media's Impact on Public Discourse:

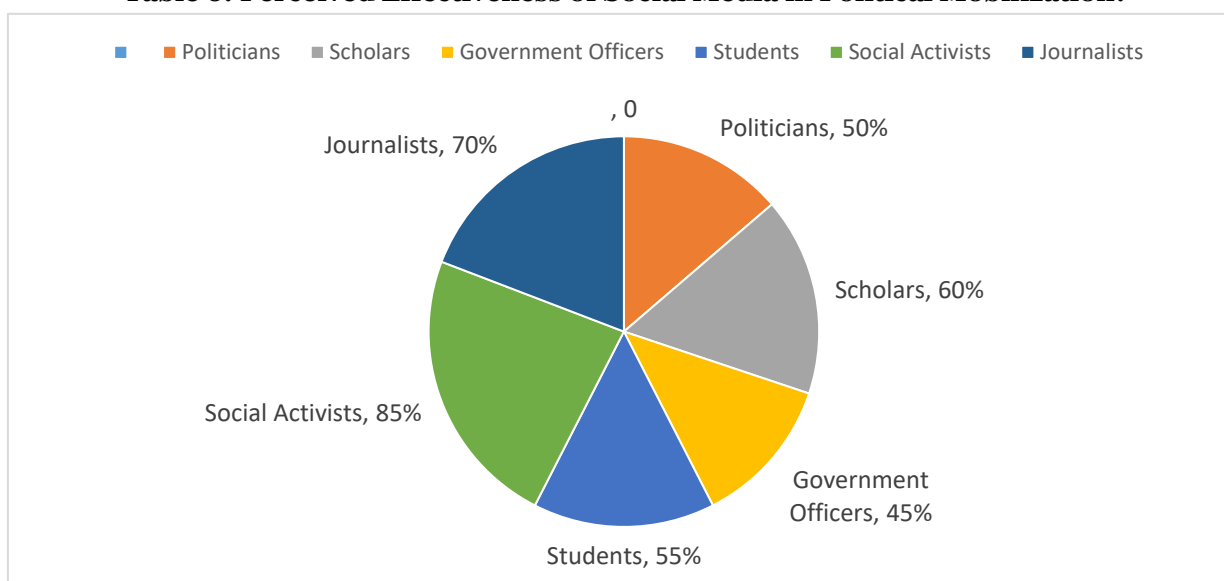


Effects of social media on the general discourse showed the existence of diverse realities among groups. It was mostly well perceived by social activists (90%) and journalists (80%) because of its contribution to political participation and opinion formation. Such moderate opinions were more typical of politicians (60%) and scholars (70%), whereas government officers were the most negative, with 40% citing the problems of misinformation and polarization.

Table 5: Social Media and Social Movements:

Source: survey data collection.

Active participation in social movements via social media was highly evident among social activists, with 80% actively engaging in movements. This is reflective of their roles as change agents, using social media for advocacy and mobilization. Students also showed a significant level of active participation (40%), indicating that social movements, including those related to student rights and education, are increasingly organized through digital platforms. On the other hand, government officers (70%) showed a passive consumption of social media movements, highlighting a more detached or observational role in the digital space. This could indicate that government officials may be more inclined to monitor social movements rather than engage directly with them.

Table 6: Perceived Effectiveness of Social Media in Political Mobilization:

Social activists (85%) were seen to have the highest perception of the effectiveness of social media in political mobilization and consider it an important instrument of awareness and protest mobilization. It was also positively rated by journalists (70%), who mentioned its ability to form the opinion of the masses and impact politics. The politicians were less united with half of them (50 percent) confirming its effectiveness. Government officers were also the most skeptical (45%), probably because of the issues of misinformation and polarization. The power of social media was perceived by students (55%) as its use in political participation by young people is increasing.

Secondary Data Collection:

Academic research papers, reports, and articles focusing on identity politics, social media, and Northeast India were reviewed to provide theoretical and historical context to the findings.

Social Media Content Analysis: Posts, hashtags, and discussions on platforms like Facebook and Twitter were analyzed to examine how political issues and identity politics are represented and debated online.

Case Studies of Social Movements: Specific case studies of social movements that have gained traction through social media platforms were analyzed to understand the relationship between digital activism and political mobilization.

The primary data was analyzed using both **qualitative** and **quantitative methods**. Qualitative analysis focused on the themes and narratives emerging from interviews, while quantitative analysis used statistical tools to evaluate survey responses. The secondary data, including social media content, was analyzed to identify patterns in how identity politics is constructed and contested in the digital space.

Results & Finding:

This study was conducted to understand how social media has shaped identity politics, public discourse and social movement in Northeast India. The secondary and primary information gathered by means of surveys and interviews presents the important details regarding the influence of these platforms on the socio-political environment. The questionnaires were examined both qualitatively and quantitatively and the people who participated in the survey represented a huge spectrum of demographic factors like social activists, journalists, politicians, government employees and students.

Social Media Usage Patterns:

The study also showed that WhatsApp had the highest reach with 70 percent of interviewees using the platform daily- a trend attributed to the increased usage of the platform in personal communication as well as political mobilisation in Northeast India. Instagram came next at 50 percent especially among the young people. Facebook (30 percent) and Twitter (25 percent) were still influential. TikTok had a lot of weekly usage (60%) and was mostly cultural, rather than political.

Awareness of Social Media's Role in Identity Politics:

The survey displayed the majority of the respondents were well-versed on the position of social media in identity politics. Social activists proved to be the most conscious with 90 percent of them admitting that it had a role to play in the creation of political identities and movements. Close behind were the journalists at 85% who have realized the strength of social media in public discourse. Politicians too were very aware (80%), of its increasing role in political processes. Awareness was a little bit low among government officers (60%) and students (70%) in contrast. These results point to the fact that an awareness of the role of social media in identity politics is growing, but the full political and mobilizing potential is still not tuned in by all sectors.

The role of Social Media in the Public Discourse:

Survey participants expressed a positive attitude to the role of social media in the mass discourse, especially social activists (90%) and journalists (80%), who stressed the possibility of the social media to give a voice to the marginalized groups, promote dialogue, and organize social movements. The social media was greatly considered as an instrument of political participation and access to information. Group perceptions were however different. Government officers were particularly disparaging, of which 40 percent cited misinformation, polarization, and fake news as their concern. Such concerns were more moderate among politicians (30%) and scholars (20%). Such reactions are an indicator of the increased recognition of the liberating and disruptive impacts of social media on politics.

Conclusion:

The current paper highlights the key role played by social media on identity politics in Northeast India. The results indicate that even though social media has led to the empowerment of marginalized groups, greater political engagement especially among the young people and activists as well as the democratization of the discourse, it has also given rise to ethnic animosities, polarization and misinformation. These two dynamics point to the potential empowering nature of digital platforms as well as their threat of destabilization of a politically and ethnically diverse region.

These findings have serious implications to policymakers, political activists, and social media corporations. The policymakers have to recognize the increasing importance of the social media in opinion-forming and identity-building. An area as sensitive as Northeast India, active digital governance is needed to fight misinformation, hate speech, and communal polarisation. This can be done through creating inclusive digital literacy curriculums and situation specific regulatory policies that can encourage responsible online participation.

The social media firms are also responsible about the usage of their sites. They should make sure that their services are not used in a way that would heighten tension especially in trouble prone regions. Ethical and positive utilization of social media Collaborating with local civil society organizations and governments to

identify and block harmful content is considered important in this regard. The possible digital media and traditional activism intersections should be studied in the future, with a particular focus on the electoral process that would facilitate evidence-based, region-specific digital policies.

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