

# Does Social Media Mobilise Indian Youth Enough To Act On Political Opinions?

 [thequint.com/opinion/can-social-media-help-teenagers-engage-with-politics](https://thequint.com/opinion/can-social-media-help-teenagers-engage-with-politics)

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One of the defining features of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the digital revolution. Social media forms an indispensable part of information dissemination in the digitally connected world. There has been an almost 70 percent rise in social media users in India during the pandemic, mainly the youth population. Facebook and Instagram have 97.2 million and 69 million users respectively from this age group in India alone.

The latest data shows that India has over 290 million social media users all across the country, in all age groups, and across various digital platforms. However, the primary use of social media for India's youth has remained a point of contention in all spheres.

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## The Influence of Social Media on the Youth

Social media has a great capacity to inspire individuals in taking both positive and negative action. After the Arab Spring, often referred to as the "Facebook Revolution" or "Twitter Uprising", academics, journalists and others are trying to discover the true purpose of social media.

The availability of news and information on social media has reduced the "information asymmetry" among people. This flow of information has transformed into people's power with which they seek greater change.

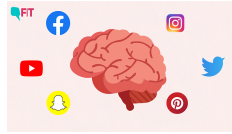
People in India use social media for 2.4 hours a day compared to the world average of 2.5 hours. The popularity of smartphones has further increased social media usage. Unsurprisingly, teenagers are the primary consumers on a majority of social media sites.

According to data collated by *Statista* in 2021, about 31 percent of all Indians using social media are teenagers or young adults between the ages of 13 and 19 years. Given the pervasiveness of social media in today's world where it is increasingly being used by the youth, the purpose of this study was to understand the role social media is playing for the educated youth in India.

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Surveys, both online and offline, were conducted by public policy students of the Policy Research Lab at OP Jindal Global University.

The primary focus was to find out if social media is truly a channel for the youth to express their discontent and thereafter, the data was collected through a structured questionnaire for a sample consisting of randomly selected educated individuals belonging to the age group of 15 to 29 years. The total number of observations crossed 200 pan-India.

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Social media has three broad characteristics: reach, accessibility, and immediacy. Various social networking sites currently in wide use are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and others. While Facebook is the number two website right after Google, Twitter has given a whole new meaning to concise communication.

Since the rise of the Internet and social media, much of the focus has drifted away from conventional sources of information. The norms of politics have also changed as a result of social media. Politicians must now respond to issues within hours at the risk of losing supporters.

Our survey of the educated Indian youth revealed confounding results compared to what has been reported so far about increasing political engagement due to social media amongst youth.

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of our respondents (belonging to the 18 to 24 years age group) did not view social media as having much impact with regard to institutional changes. About 55 percent of respondents strongly believe that “no definite change can be brought through social media.”

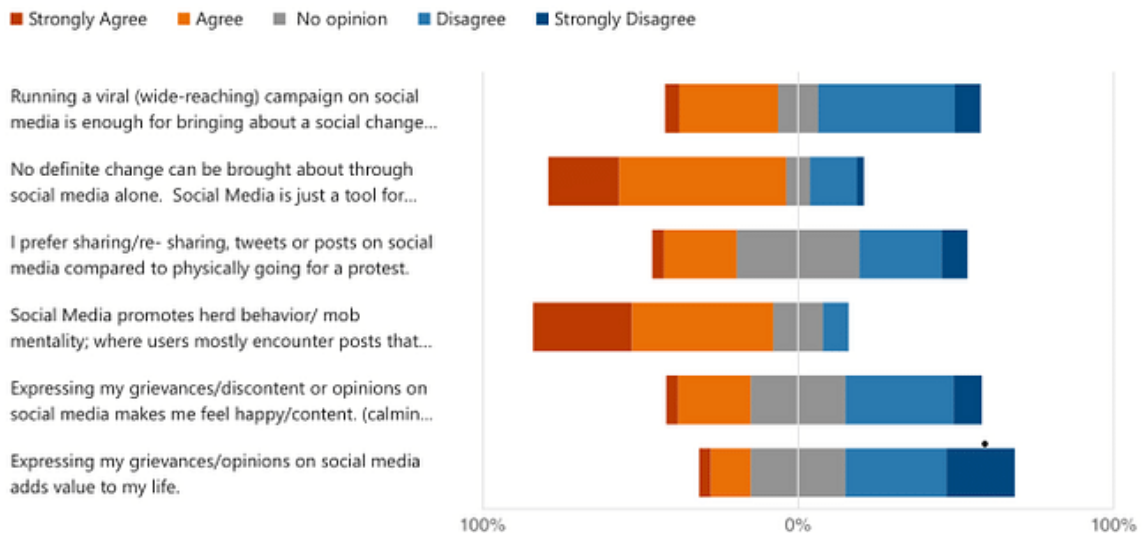
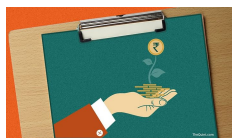


Figure 1: Youth Perception of Social Media

Source: Survey conducted by Policy Research Lab, JSGP, JGU

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Currently, social media acts as more of an abetting mechanism than aiding in any form of mobilisation for a cause. Youth, in particular belonging to the age group of 24 to 29 years, find social media as a viable alternative to joining protests or demonstrations. The opportunity cost of participating in any movement physically for this age group is higher compared to the younger ones.

Today, the primary use of social media for the youth is for entertainment and communication (Figure 2), as opposed to anything constructive. Very rarely do young, educated people use social media to express their discontent (Fig 2 & 3) or politically engage with issues.

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

[More Details](#)



Figure 2: Primary Use of Social Media

Source: Survey conducted by Policy Research Lab, JSGP, JGU

24. 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?

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Figure 3: Expressing Discontent

Source: Survey conducted by Policy Research Lab, JSGP, JGU

Only 30 percent of the youth sampled (58 out of 200+ respondents) have shared, or would like to share opinions over social media on political issues such as the role played by opposition parties, the revival of the Congress, etc. The majority of respondents are more interested in social issues such as caste discrimination, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, animal rights and so on.

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

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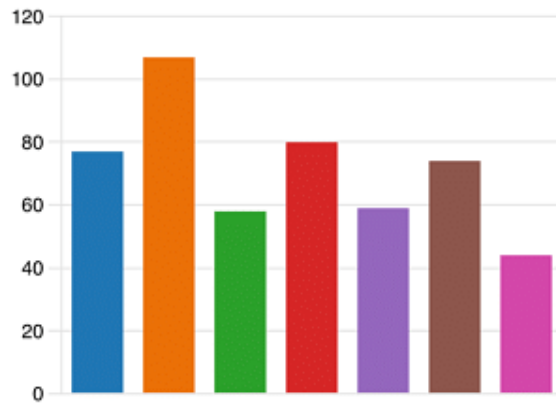
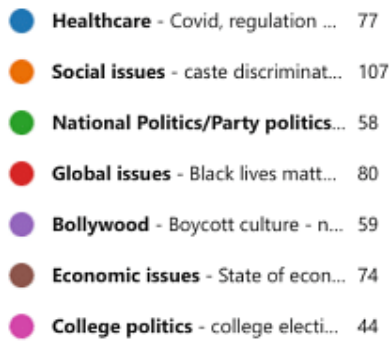


Figure 4: Political Engagement of Youth in India

Source: Survey conducted by Policy Research Lab, JSQP, JGU

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## Political Awareness Amongst the Youth

At present, the educated Indian youth does not perceive social media as a mobilisation tool for any cause. They do not believe that any reasonable change can be brought about by ranting on social media.

Article 19 (1) (a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to express one's views and opinions about any issue through any channel. However, under the present regime, the political rights of citizens have constantly been under threat.

The *World Governance Indicator* records a decreasing trend for India from 2011 to 2021 on the 'Voice and Accountability' indicator.

In 2011, India's rank was 61, decreasing by 10 points to the 51st rank in 2021. There seems to be an atmosphere of fear amongst people – the youth in particular.

After Disha Ravi's case, younger people have taken a backseat from mainstream politics. Nonetheless, we found that upper-caste men from high-income backgrounds are more likely to express their opinion over social media as compared to the rest.

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Prior to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, many surveys, polls, and election studies reported the aspirations of the first-time voters. However, in the run-up to the 2024 election, the focus has evidently shifted away from the youth. Nowadays, social media use comprises mere engagement through reposts or retweets.

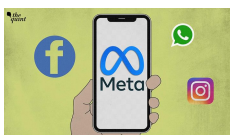
Given this scenario, there is a stark change in how the role of social media is being perceived in furthering one's opinions and if it provides a platform for critical thinking, questioning, and discourse.

*(The authors are part of Policy Research Lab, School of Government and Public Policy at the O.P. Jindal Global University. This is an opinion article and the views expressed above are the author's own. **The Quint** neither endorses nor is responsible for them.)*

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