# ***[Workshop] Mediated Campaigns and Unmediated Politics in Millennial India***

## List of Abstracts and authors (in order of presentation)

**Dr. Aasim Khan (IIIT–D), Shobha S V (Co-Media Lab) and Angelina Chamuah (IIIT-Delhi) – *Networking Beyond Bylines: A study of digital journalism in India***

*There is a growing interest in the nature of online social  networking and social media use among Indian citizens, particularly the millennial generation (Udupa, Venkatraman and Khan, forthcoming). Recent research (Bruns 2013) has sought to contextualize the use of new media within specific social contexts like journalism. As (Neuberger et al. 2013) argue, social media platforms functions as a “a multifunctional tool for public communication” with journalists using it for a broad range of professional activities. So far in India, the focus has largely been on the everyday interactions and popular culture which is also valuable, but an institutional view of journalism and their engagement with social media platforms like Twitter is missing, This paper sheds fresh light on the way in which the  rise of social networking online has changed of journalists’ in inter-mediating responsibility and power —both as functionaries in political communication as well as bearer of trustworthy information.*

*Besides the focus on the unique affordances of specific new media, from Whatsapp to Twitter, we also explore how these get adapted to the ‘constant news cycle’ (Karlsson 2011), which is emblematic even of the hybrid media system in India today. A a more social perspective brings the focus on usage and customary level online actions, as well as the more ‘self-interested’ actions which pertain to personal engagement between journalists and their public. Hence, in this paper, we take three interrelated registers of social action on digital platforms (Weber, 1991), and combine our findings to study the implications of online social networking in terms of the impact it has on the sense of power and propriety experienced by the journalists.*

Dr Aasim Khan has completed a PhD from King’s College London in Politics and Public Policy (Contemporary India).

Angelina Chamuah (Teaching Fellow and Researcher NewsLab, IIIT-Delhi). Angelina is currently a Teaching Fellow for the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Indraprastha Institute for Information Technology, Delhi. She has researched the emergent forms of digital and sociable technologies and the interaction between humans and artificial intelligence systems in her M.Phil. in Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics.

Shobha S V (Co-Media Lab), Shobha is a digital media professional with a combined cross-sectoral experience of thirteen years in journalism, research and digital media for non profits. She leads [Co Media Lab](https://comedialab.in/), a space for learning and collaboration for citizen problem solvers, community reporters and young journalists. In the past, Shobha has worked with International Center For Journalists on their Knight Journalism Fellowship as a program manager of their India program.

**Ganesh Pol (BBC News) – *How do party ‘karyakartas’ use social media for election campaigning?***

*Power brokers or Karyakartas of a political party play a pivotal role in mobilising people during elections. Irrespective of election season, Karyakartas meet and greet voters on a personal level. They do door to door visit, attend weddings, funerals, and help voters in facilitating development schemes. Karyakarta join voters in their good and bad times which are aimed at building social capital for political gains. Now, traditional methods of connecting to voters got a boost with the arrival of social media. Again, young Karyakartas have become important anchors of all political activities on social media. On the one hand, all national and regional political parties have figured out their social media strategy. Bhartiya Janata Party and Aam Admi Party were perhaps the first one to foresee its importance. Other parties have also built significant presence on digital platforms. On the other hand, local political leaders are coming up with their own autonomous social media ecosystem. Young tech savvy Karyakartas are becoming a de facto close aide of respective politicians. Therefore, this paper will discuss the social media work of a young political Karyakarta from Madha Lok Sabha constituency from Maharashtra. It will not look into theoretical or philosophical context. The paper would just describe the ground level political narratives on social media, its production houses and distribution networks.*

About the author: Ganesh Pol is working as a Broadcast Journalist with BBC News Marathi in New Delhi since July 2017. He writes text stories and creates digital videos on local, national and international issues for www.bbc.com/marathi He has completed MA Development from Azim Premji University, Bangalore and BA (H) in political science from University of Delhi. Earlier, he has worked on eight months research project on social media & Uttar Pradesh assembly elections 2017.

**Cihnnita Baruah (JNU) – *Media and identity formation: The individual and the collective in the Bodoland movement***

*Identity is a multifaceted concept and its articulation is an ongoing process in which, historically speaking, media has played an important role. The onset of new technologies, such as mobile phones and internet that pave the way for social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter among others, has helped in transcending the limitations of time and space. The resultant virtual space presents an individual with the opportunity to develop a sense of identity that may not be restricted to any given set of norms, beliefs and ideologies. In the contemporary times, such an intervention caused by this novel disruptive technology, has an immense potential of affecting the dynamics of any social movement as well challenging the existing collective sense of identity.*

*With varying levels of penetration, where demography is not limited to territory, education levels or occupation among others, and where ethnicity becomes an essential manifestation of biopolitics, Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) provides ample opportunity to further analyse and re-imagine the idea of identity. As such, this paper shall aim to study the mobilisation of masses through the media platforms and shall help in understanding how social media influences individual aspirations, that may differ from a collective agenda. This paper will further be useful in understanding the role of social media as an agenda setter in a democratic setup and its impact on the individual- collective sense of identity.*

About the author: Cihnnita Baruah is currently pursuing her PhD from the Centre for the study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has a background in Political Science and has completed her graduation as well as post-graduation from the University of Delhi. Her areas of interests include Northeast India, Ethnicity, Identity Politics, Conflict studies, Social Movements.

**Sakshi Bhalla (JNU) – *The technological mediation of political rhetoric in the age of Twitter***

*As platforms, social media networks allowed an interface of a wide variety of opinions cutting across an individual’s social categories. The ease of access and the depth of penetration provided by these platforms, in particular Twitter, have allowed journalists to break news, activists to mobilise opinion and the public at large to opine on issues of governance – creating a likeness to a Habermasian public sphere where the public could congregate democratically and conduct rational discourse, away from the eyes of the powers. However, with increased public participation came algorithms creating virtual echo chambers limiting diversity of opinion a user maybe exposed to, as well as opportunities to advertise to him/her. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to analyze if the digital public sphere (in particular, Twitter) is being reclaimed by the larger ideology of authority using such platforms; and if so, how. Further, and more broadly, we explore the paradoxical existence of Twitter, which at once enables free expression and wide dissemination, as well as the creation of subversive narratives in the form of representative publicity. For this, we look at specific instances of the invocation of the ideas of “Urban Naxal” and “tukde-tukde gang”, and the recent expose by “Cobrapost”, using methods of digital ethnography to explore how they affect general political discourse and conception of social justice. The technological mediation of political rhetoric and enmeshed language would be another premise to study.*

About the Author: Sakshi is pursuing her Masters in Linguistics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

**Kankana Talukdar (JNU) – *Our Citizen Selves on Facebook: A Thinking, Acting, Resisting Assam around the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016***

*The proliferation of new media especially social media spaces like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter amongst others it is believed, have provided new grounds whereby citizens have a platform to don a more public character and engage in collective politics. The increasing use of social media especially afforded by mobile internet data packs has facilitated entry into the digital public for many, as a collective as also individuals. Here, Facebook has often been the first point of entry into the online social and political for many. This paper takes up Facebook as a site from leisure to one of politics when the situation arises. Understanding citizenship as a discursive practice as also one that is embedded in institutional processes, the paper looks at resistance around the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 in Assam. In doing so, it takes up electronic texts including online articles which circulate, posts, comments and counter-comments as primary sources of analysing how publics manifested their citizen identities online. In terms of specificity of the case taken up, the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 had seen much debates and resistance particularly stemming from Assam, with its intermittent history around questions of the idea of citizenship. The popular discourse on citizenship in the state has veered around legalities, illegalities, and filtering in becoming citizens. This paper while critically engaging with these, aims at a discursive exercise in engaging with the varied nuances- at one level bringing back hints of irredentism from the ‘mainland Indian citizens’, at other levels being citizens within the state as long drawn rhetorics of contestation that lay as much in its institutional as also its everyday. The Bill, in its current status has lapsed. Yet the way it reinvigorated multiple sites of enacting our citizens selves, provides fodder to this paper for a retrospective reflection.*

About the author: Kankana is a doctoral student at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her thesis entitled “Democratic Citizenship, New Technologies and the Public Sphere in Assam” examines the nature of citizenship practices and public sphere as it stands with the proliferation of new media technologies.

**Amogh Sharma (University of Oxford): *‘Internet Hindus’ and the Rise of ‘Post-Truth Politics’ in India***

*The 2014 Indian General Elections were widely termed as “India’s first social media election” – a pointed reference to the widespread use of new media technology during the election campaign, particularly by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Simultaneously, there has been the emergence of ‘Internet Hindus’ i.e. self-confessed Hindu Nationalists who use the Internet to engage in vicious abuse and intimidation (also known as ‘trolling’) of those who are seen to be critics of Hindu nationalism. In addition to being an ‘anti-social’ nuisance, these Internet Hindus also engage in the deliberate dissemination of misinformation and communally charged propaganda on the cyberspace.*

*This paper provides an empirically grounded and historically informed analysis of how ‘Internet Hindus’ have come to serve as the new foot soldiers of Hindu Nationalism, and to what extent they constitute a new era of ‘post-truth politics’ in India. I argue that the use of Internet by Hindu nationalists in recent years needs to be seen as part of a longer genealogy of media based propaganda that has been in operation since the 1980s. By drawing upon interviews conducted with ‘Internet Hindus’, I analyze how and why ordinary social media users come to assume the identity of being an ‘Internet Hindu’, the meaning that they associate with this term, and what role they see themselves playing as the foot soldiers of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India.*

About the author: Amogh Dhar Sharma is a doctoral candidate in International Development at the University of Oxford. His current doctoral research examines the changing nature of electoral and party politics, and the on-going ‘professionalisation of politics’ in India. His broader research interests include political parties & democratisation, political communication, and political economy of development.

**Priyam Ghosh (JNU) – *Performing Protest on Cyberspace: Understanding Viral Politics of Pink Chaddi Campaign and Besharmi Morcha***

*New forms of political mobilization and participation on various social media were made possible via active participation on social networks. Though, internet remains to be the means to access of chosen few, where only few politically engaged and active elite can access; it is important to understand the concepts to study the phenomenon of political mobilization through internet. Nils Gustafsson names these two concepts as, ‘temporal elites’ and ‘viral politics’ (2009:35). While early performance studies scholars (Manola Gayatri: 2009) looked at the aspect of mediatised performance in offline as well as online spaces, this paper attempts to take the discourse foreword and analyze how these concepts in turn aid in political organization which at times is spontaneous, individualized and organized. Examples of political mobilization through viral politics would include analysis of feminist strategies and performance of humour and satire in Pink Chaddi Campaign (2009), and Indian chapter of Slut Walk also known as Besharmi Morcha (2011) and how social media intervention aided in creating a spectacle out of the event.*

The paper through case-studies of two political performances i.e. Pink Chaddi Campaign (2009), and Besharmi Morcha (2013), both of them took place in online social networking sites will emphasize on varied representations of performances of gender and sexuality in a supposed ‘safe’ space of virtual networking sites. The social networking sites have emerged as a ‘safe space’ where the non-normative and non-conforming denizens of the virtual world express and share their views/ lives without been subjected to ‘real’, ‘physical’ violence which is often lived and faced by them. The paper aims to study these performances and personalities of the cyber space, and through what strategies the protest pages went viral.

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**Dr Avishek Ray (NIT Assam) – *Imag(in)ing Radicalism: Hashtags and Memes in Indian Student Activism***

*In the era of new media, the proliferation of dissent on the Internet has become iconic emblems of oppositional politics. This paper focuses on three hashtags -- #Hokkolorob, #HandsoffJU and #SaveJNU -- and allied memes that characterize ‘dissenting’ student politics in contemporary Indian university space. #Hokkolorob emerged from a particular case of student molestation in the Jadavpur University (Kolkata) in 2014; #HandsoffJU as a reaction to the reorientation of the undergrad student intake policy of the same university in 2018; and, #SaveJNU from the supposed bureaucratic take-over of Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi) in 2017 in the wake of what appeared ‘anti-national’ in the statist gaze. This paper uses the hashtags and memes as case studies to critique the eliticization of certain universities, and the enclavist values it invokes. It examines how certain universities (not some others) are construed as epitomes of ‘progressive’ values, wherein certain ‘imagined communities’ -- the JNU-ites, for example -- become the referent for ‘radical’ identity. Taking off from here, this paper seeks to understand:*

*How do the 3 hashtags in question enable new imaginations and articulations of belonging and political partisanship? What imaginations of the university -- both as a concept and a pedagogic outfit -- do they furnish? What kinds of political participation are encouraged and what kinds discouraged? Which voices are amplified and which voices effaced? Far from assessing the impact, virality or efficacy of these hashtags, this paper looks into the discursive ‘encoding’ (c.f. Stuart Hall) of the hashtags, which is then used as a conduit for manufacturing the ‘radical’ identity: ‘a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions, appreciations and actions’ (Bourdieu, 1988: 279).*

About the author: Avishek Ray teaches at the National Institute of Technology Silchar (India). He has earned his PhD in Cultural Studies from Trent University, Canada. He is interested in intellectual histories, and works on, broadly speaking, issues concerning travel and migration. His research looks into the epistemic foundation of the heuristic construct ‘vagabond’, and the convergence between the politics of itinerancy and that of dissent in the context of South Asia.

**Dr Joyojeet Pal (Microsoft Research India/ University of Michigan) – *Booths, Brickbats, Brands and Bollywood: Social media in the 2019 Indian General Elections***

*In this presentation, we consider the role of social media in the Indian 2019 general elections. Using a mix of collected data on social media use by politicians and open discussion on peoples' experience with social media in the election cycle, we examine celebrity engagement, online attacks, booth agent interactions, and brand management by politicians. We consider the impacts of these on democratic discourse in India as well as other parts of the global south where politicians increasingly use social media as an alternative to direct engagement with the professional mainstream media.*

About the author: Joyojeet Pal is a senior researcher at Microsoft Research India. His work focuses on the use of social media in political elections. He received his [B.Com](http://B.Com) from Mumbai University and his PhD in City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley. He researched and produced “For the Love of a Man” a documentary film on the cult of personality surrounding south Indian film star Rajinikanth which premiered at the 2015 Venice Film Festival.

**Dr Lipika Kamra (Jindal Global University) & Dr. Philippa Williams (Queen Mary University) – *Political parties, digital media platforms and mediating urban life in India***

*Drawing on current fieldwork in the lead up to the 2019 Indian national elections this paper opens up sightlines for interrogating the changing relationship between political party organisation and campaign, digital media platforms and everyday urban life. WhatsApp is forecast to be the platform of choice on which India’s national political parties will campaign and organise. The ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party has reportedly enlisted a ‘cell phone pramukh’ for every electoral booth to reach smartphone owning voters via WhatsApp, whilst the Indian National Congress party has hired ‘cyber warriors’ for each booth and invited people to share their smartphone numbers with @WhatsappCongress to stay connected. Based on digital ethnographic research, the paper intends to examine the tone and content of these digital political campaigns, with a specific focus on how such digital content is mediating urban political life within India’s neighbourhoods. As such, the paper engages with and extends debates on the role of political parties in (re)producing the urban, techno-cultural politics and political party practice, and the everyday life of elections in India.*

About the author: Lipika Kamra is an Assistant Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University. She is a political anthropologist who works on gender, state, and democracy. She is conducting research on two projects: the first is an ethnographic study of women voters' attitudes towards elections; and the second is a qualitative study of how social media platforms such as Whatsapp are transforming everyday political conversations in India.

## **Guest and keynote speakers**

**Cyril Sam** is a freelance journalist and researcher based out of New Delhi. His interests lie at the intersection of technology and the business of news media. In the past, he has been associated with the International Center for Journalists, Scroll.in, Catch News and Tehelka magazine. His upcoming book looks at the relationship between Facebook India and the Narendra Modi campaign.

**Shehla Rashid Shora** is an Indian politician and activist, currently pursuing a Ph.D. at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

**Prof Sahana Udupa** is a communications scholar and social anthropologist with research and teaching interests in digital politics, global digital cultures, news media and journalism, urban politics, and media policy. Previously, she was Research Fellow and currently a Senior Research Partner at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany. Prior to joining LMU, she was Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at the School of Public Policy, Central European University.

**Prof Christophe Jaffrelot** is senior research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris, professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at King’s India Institute, London, and non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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