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Media Fatigue and Information Overload: How Social Media Influences Support for Offline Movements in Indian

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Abstract

The study was conducted to understand the prevalence of media fatigue among social media users who engaged with information related to farmers' protest. To check this, two important dates were chosen, the 26th of January tractor parade and the 5th of March 100 day anniversary, and a comparative analysis of the social media post engagement was done. A statistical analysis on the data was performed using correlation coefficient and the findings were verified with the help of that. Additionally, a sentiment analysis of 50 comments each was carried out to understand the dominant sentiment and its correlation with the engagement and fatigue. Lastly, a survey was conducted with 203 people who answered 20 questions related to their engagement with information related to farmers' protest on social media. The findings suggest that an increase in the information around the protest caused the people to experience fatigue which further dampened their support for the movement overall. The study also raises important questions which provides light for further research to understand this relation in detail.

Keywords: Social media, Media Fatigue, Information Overload, Offline movements, Protest

Introduction

India has witnessed a huge increase in the number of social media users in the last decade. As per the data shared by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY) in 2021, there are a total of more than 53 crores WhatsApp users in India. Similarly, the number people who use platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter stands at 44.8 crores, 41 crores, 21 crores, and 1.5 crores respectively (Chakravarty, 2021). These statistics are indicative of the fact that information technology, or social media, is today a major force of change and influence in India. One event that is seen as a defining moment in terms of social media's power to start and sustain large-scale protest is the 'Arab Spring'. Research has linked increased activity on social media platform on one day with the possible increase in offline protest on the following day where people who are not personally related to each other also come together to coordinate and spread the message (Zachary C Steinert-Threlkeld, 2015).

In India, large-scale mobilization and collective action on the ground was witnessed during the 'India Against Corruption' movement organized civil society activists and led by Anna Hazare. Similarly, mobilization was observed during the protests after Delhi Gang Rape in 2012 (Bute, 2014). Research in Psychology has also found signs of positive relation between the online activity and offline protest owing to the interpersonal effect of coordinating and developing social identities through social media platforms and the intrapersonal effect of emboldening preconditions like morality and shared beliefs (Hedy Greijdanus, 2020).

In 2017, the popularization of #MeToo on Twitter in the USA brought to the centre discussion on sexual harassment faced by women on an everyday basis. According to Pew Research Center, by September 2018, #MeToo was used over 19 million times. This means the hashtag was used 55,319 times per day on an average starting from the first tweet that was made in

2017 (Monica Anderson, 2018). Within months of the first tweet by Alyssa Milano, an actress, against Harvey Weinstein, a Hollywood film producer, on October 15, 2017, the hashtag had spread across the globe with a total of 2.3 million tweets being sent from 85 countries. India, along with the US, UK, France, and Canada registered the highest number of tweets with #MeToo (Powell, 2017). The mainstream media also picked this news and it became a top talking point for months, including in India where some of the biggest names from Bollywood like Alok Nath (Scroll, 2018), and politics like MJ Akbar surfaced (Kurian, 2018).

The prevalence of social media in people's lives and its expected growth in future makes it an important topic of research as there is still a lot left to discover about the relation between the online activism and offline collective action. This author wants to shed light on a new aspect of this relation which might have hitherto been ignored.

Relevance of the Study

This study is especially important in today's world where people are exposed to huge amounts of information through social media as well as mainstream media like television, radio, newspapers etc. Information overload in any form or through any source can overwhelm a person and hamper one's decision-making (Cazaly, L. 2021). The Information Overload Research Group has a word for this – infoxication – or data smog. In our 'always online' culture, we are constantly exposed to information about recent events, and it is difficult to disconnect ourselves from what is happening around us. This makes today's social media age very different from the pre-internet era. Therefore, any major event exposes individuals to vast amounts of information, competing opinions, and heightened emotions that may have a strong impact on them causing overwhelm and further leading to compassion fatigue. Therefore, this study is highly relevant in today's context.

Review of Literature

In the year 1964, US President Lyndon Johnson became target of public outrage because of an unusual reason. The president had lifted his dog by ears in front of the media. This story became a headline the following day and led to animal rights activists and general population criticizing Johnson for being callous and hurting the dog (Kramer). Visuals in the media have always been a powerful tool of eliciting compassion. The link between documentary pictures and compassion has been found in a way that the exposure of audience to pictures of suffering repeatedly creates a long-term impact. The same has been observed in research of audience exposed to media reports of suffering of the Kosovo war (Hoijer, 2004). Audience is invited to experience the suffering of others through the visuals in the media, thus leading to an experience of compassion from a distance. For example, the discourse of global compassion was found to most strongly dominate the memories of women when it came to the Kosovo War. The object of focus during the coverage was human suffering and mass fight of refugees who left their homes. The audience remembered these pictures of "streams of refugees or pictures of crying people in refugee camps," writes Hojier in Media, Culture, and Society (Hoijer, 2004).

However, another effect of visuals of human suffering has been observed in the audience. It can also lead to 'distantation from compassion' among the people. This means that being exposed to frequent images of suffering can also make people turn away from the information or not letting themselves be affected by it. This adverse reaction to news of suffering has been termed as 'compassion fatigue' (Tester, 2001). Compassion fatigue has been defined by Tester (2001) as a condition where people get accustomed to the visuals of misery, dreadful events, or suffering to a point that they stop noticing them. Over the last two decades, especially in the last 10 years, there have been much research in the same field to understand this psychological impact of extensive exposure to the pain and suffering of humans suffering through the visuals

in media. But the study is not able to clearly establish a direct relation between information overload, social media behaviour, and reduced support towards social movements of protest movements because of compassion fatigue.

Various psychological studies have discovered about the limited capacity of humans to retain or store information in their memory (Quentin Jones, 2004). This state where an individual or a system cannot process and utilize all the information it is receiving and leading to a breakdown can be defined as the state of information overload (ibid.). This information overload has been categorized as an important factor which influences people's decision to switch from a particular form of media to the other, or a particular topic to the next (Xin Zhang, 2020). Social media's another important aspect is that it causes a rapid expansion of one's network and multiplication of social interactions, which in turn leads to an exposure to a lot of information. This information explosion and social media platforms' overuse is also found to be linked to adverse psychological effects in individuals that are caused due to overload (Muhammad Asim, 2018). This heavy exposure to information can cause mental fatigue and lead to feelings of anxiety, burnout, tiredness, boredom, and nonchalance among the people, which also leads to a declining interest in the things which were a source of excitement in the past (Zhang, 2016).

When it comes to the relational complexity of online activism and offline social movements, most of the researchers have found a positive correlation between the two, with the former aiding the latter. However, previous research to ascertain the power equation between media and protest movements have pointed towards a stronger dominance of the media. Primarily, the movements are more dependent upon the media for survival and growth. They need the media for three major purposes – "mobilization through public discourse, validation by getting support of the masses, and scope enlargement." (William A. Gamson, 1993)

This begs the question whether the social movements today have become even more dependent on the media, particularly social media? It is an important question because of the study in impact of information overload on media audience. As far back as 2004, with the emergence of online interaction spaces like Usenet newsgroups, the evidence of users discontinuing active engagement following the overexposure to mass information have been found (Quentin Jones, 2004).

An analysis of 600 Usenet groups consisting of 2.65 million posts also discovered that the users are likely to be more inclined to engage with or respond to simpler messages "and also generate simpler messages as the overloading increases." Further studies have also found occurrences of compassion fatigue in the audience linked to massive and repeated coverage of a human-interest stories in the mainstream media. The hype created by the media can lead to people feeling bored or disconnected with the actual story (Audun Beyer, 2018).

Paul Lazarsfeld and RK Merton had suggested this 'Narcotizing Dysfunction' caused by media in the American population. They stated that an excessive supply of communication can generate a superficial concern from audience. Further, they said that this overburdening because of excessive information is more likely to play a narcotizing function rather than energizing the audience. They conclude that this can translate to a decrease in organized action while the consumption of information increases. (Paul Lazarsfeld, 1948)

Now, study to understand the relation between compassion, social problems, and emotional burnout suggests that people feel empathetic when they see someone in distress. However, this also generates negative emotions within an individual which they want to reduce in two ways – altruism or avoidance (Dean M Krugman, 1996). Further, the research has also looked at the relationship between proneness to boredom among people and their increased consumption of social media messages, which links to information overload and fatigue (Whelan, Islam, &

Brooks, 2021). In addition, data-driven information which tells audience about the severity of suffering in terms of numbers has also been observed to "diminish empathy and undermine response" (Scott R Maier, 2016).

This distentation from an issue of human-interest has also been attributed to the media's excessive coverage of an event to an extent that it can be categorized as a 'media hype'. This hype produces news which is often repetitive in nature. In addition to that, the human-interest framing of the story can also cause an emotional stress to the audiences and has the potential of creation compassion fatigue among them (Figenschou, 2018). Thus, there has been ample research in the past which proves that a sustained exposure to excessive information through media and the framing of news as a human-interest story may lead to a social and information fatigue among people. This has also been characterized as compassion fatigue. Further, research has also found a connection between "people' online and offline behaviours" pointing towards a positive correlation between offline and online activism (Hedy Greijdanus, 2020).

The prevalence of information fatigue can be assessed from various studies conducted to understand this phenomenon over the years. These studies look at the changing digital landscape and have also dealt with the important question of preventing and dealing with information overload (Arnold, M. 2023). With the continuously evolving social media landscape, it can be expected that the information overload will only increase. Therefore, the outcomes and reasons of social media fatigue are being examined continuously with this changing landscape. A paper titled 'Social media fatigue: Causes and concerns' published in the 'International Journal of Social Psychiatry' has discovered the four umbrella factors of social media fatigue, like Self and Personality Factors, Cognitive Factors, Social Factors and Environmental Factors (Sunil, S. 2022).

Objectives

- To understand the link between compassion fatigue and engagement with offline social movements
- To analyse the role of information overload through social media and mass support for protest movements
- To compare the level of media fatigue between two milestone farmers' protest events and correlate with level of support for the cause

Research Questions

- Did the social media users feel tired or exhausted with information related to farmers protest?
- What was the dominant emotion/sentiment during different states of protest and how did it correlate with the social media fatigue?
- Does the level of fatigue correlate with reduced support for the movement?
- What are the indicators of reduced support for a protest movement?
- How has people's perception of the movement changed with the change in exposure?

Methodology

This study has three crucial dimensions. First, it explored how social media information overload can cause compassion fatigue among the audiences. Second, it tried to find out whether there is a correlation between the framing of information, emotional response of the audiences, and its effects on the level of fatigue. Lastly, the research delved into the possibility of any shift in the support for offline movement through different ways because of the social media fatigue. Therefore, to gain a holistic understanding of the issue, the researcher focused

on the farmers protest at the borders of Delhi which began in February 2021, and they have tried to look at how the sudden increase in social media discourse around the protest and the explosion of highly emotionally stirring content like videos, photos, and text impacted audience's reception of the further information related to the protest.

Theoretical Framework

Narcotizing Dysfunction

Abundant supply of information to the people through mass media has a narcotizing effect on them making the people apathetic towards the issue. Several studies have analysed this effect of mass media, and it has been found that an exposure to lot of information makes the average audience less energetic towards the issue instead of doing the opposite (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). This is also linked with the concept of slacktivism and clicktivism where it is believed that an average online activist spends more time showing support for the movement through online activism rather than offline action (Hedy Greijdanus, 2020). This theory and its definition are highly relevant for the aim of this study as it directly deals with excessive information's adverse effect on the audiences resulting in them becoming apathetic towards it. It would get clarity over the response of audiences to exposure to abundant information related to the farmers' movement.

Selectivity Theories

The selectivity theories are grounded in the psychological theory of Cognitive Dissonance, which was proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957. The theory proposes that people experience psychological distress when they are exposed to information which challenges their existing beliefs, thus seeking consonance by consuming information which proves them right. The selectivity theories, along with cognitive dissonance theory, applies to this research as it can

explain that the dissonance experienced by people when exposed to a large amount of information can cause them to also withdraw from it altogether.

User engagement, Sentiment analysis and Online survey

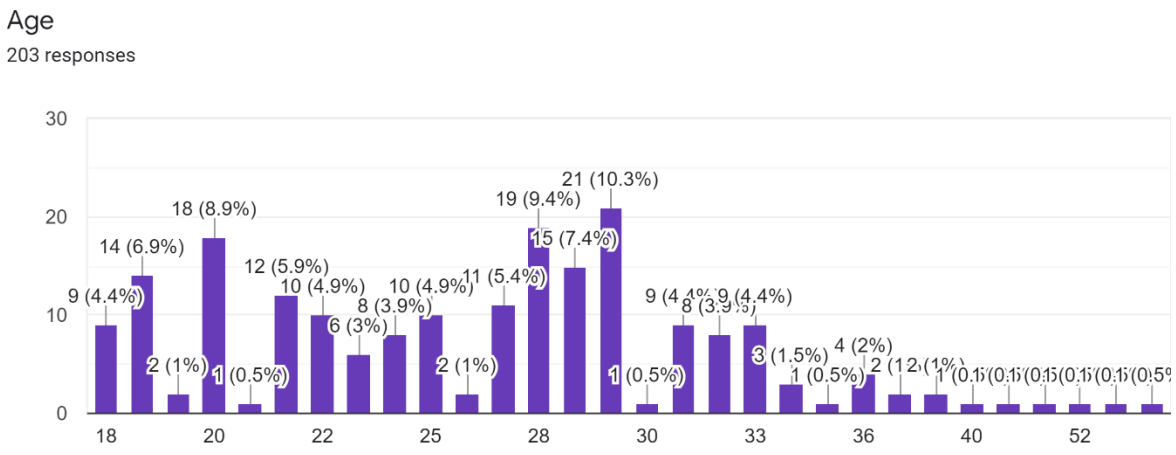
Two important events were chosen to carry out a comparative analysis of how the audiences reacted to these two events. The first event was the tractor parade organised by the farmers on 26th January 2021 which also resulted in violent clashes between the protesters and the Delhi Police. The reason for choosing this event was that it led to a sudden uptick in the human-interest centric discourse around farmers protest on social media as well as mainstream media. Therefore, analysing how this increase in the consumption of emotion-driven information related to farmers protest affected people's overall compassion and fatigue levels would help in achieving the study's objectives.

The second event chosen was the 100-day anniversary of the protests which was on 5th March 2021. The reason for selecting this event was that it was the only big event to have taken place in the aftermath of 26th January parade. The farmers organised protests and marked this day as black day. The goal was to analyse how the social media engagement compared between the two events. Additionally, to understand the dominant emotion and narrative during these two events, comments made by the individuals on Facebook posts and YouTube videos were also analysed and their sentiment was recorded. A total of 50 comments each made on 26th January and 5th March were randomly selected and compiled in Microsoft Excel, following which the Azure Artificial Intelligence tool was used to analyse the dominant emotion or sentiment in each of these comments.

To compare the dominance of social media discourse during the two events, the researcher looked at four important Facebook profiles and recorded the total comments, likes, views, and shared on the posts made by these profiles either on 26th January and 5th March, or the days

around these two major events. The four profiles chosen were that of Kisan Ekta Morcha, Rakesh Tikait, Yogendra Yadav, and Amandeep Sandhu. The reason for selecting these four profiles was that the first was the official page representing the farmers movement, the second was a tall leader of the entire protest and the face of it, the third was also a part of the core team of people leading the protests and an important public intellectual, and the fourth was a journalist who documented and shared daily updates related to the protest through Facebook.

The researcher also surveyed the average social media users to understand how they engaged with the posts and information related to farmers' protests. Questions were framed to gauge the overall use of digital platforms by these individuals, their exposure to the farmers' protest news, their participation and support for the movement, and the impact of information overload and subsequent compassion fatigue caused by it. The questions were shared via Google Form and 203 unique responses were received. The participants ranged between the age groups of 18 to 55, thereby covering a comprehensive section of the society and gain an overall understanding of the social media information overload irrespective of the age.



The two methods helped in understanding the response of individuals and also the actual impact on social media activity reflected through the change in engagement on Facebook posts and YouTube videos. Together, they were successful in providing a holistic picture of the effect of information overload on media fatigue and people's support for the farmers' movement in India.

Findings

The study covered the dimensions of the impact of information overload through social media platforms and its implications for offline movements. The data was collected through videos on social media platforms and audience survey. The following are the findings:

1. Comparative analysis of social media engagement

Three Facebook posts by Kisan Ekta Morcha made on 26th of January were analysed for the total number of likes, comments, and views received by them. The three posts were selected because they were they had the highest engagement. All the three posts were live videos related to the tractor parade conducted by the farmers in Delhi. The highest views on any of the posts were 10,6000 which means the video was watched as many number of times. This was followed by 57,000 and 31,000 views. Similarly, number of comments in the descending order were 467, 433, and 151. Lastly, the number of likes in the same order were 7900, 3200, and 2400 (all numbers rounded off).

The researchers compared this with the posts made by Kisan Ekta Morcha on March 6 and 7 on their Facebook page. This was done because the page posted a video related to the 100th day anniversary on 6th March. Additionally, the engagement of post on 7th March was also analysed to have a more robust comparison with the engagement on 26th January and to draw strong conclusion. The highest grossing post on 26th January was compared with the two posts in

March. The post on 6th March received 12,000 views, only 11.3% of the highest views received by a post on 26th January). The post on 7th March received 10,000 views; 2000 less than 6th March. Similarly, the post on 6th March and 7th March received only 1,000 and 1,300 likes respectively, as compared to 7,900 on 26th January. The number of comments were also comparatively small standing at 59 and 57 on the consecutive days (Figure 1).

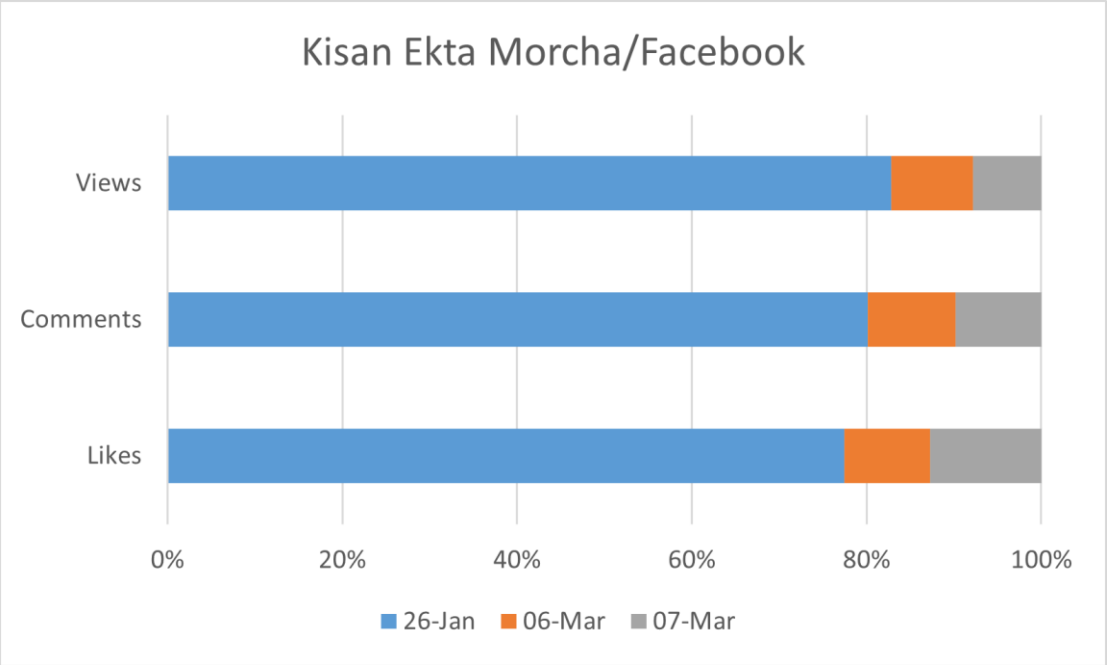


Figure 1*: Social Media engagement on 26th January compared with 6th and 7th March. The post engagement on 26th January is considerably higher than the other two days.*

Similar trend was observed in the posts made by Yogendra Yadav. His posts on 25th January and 26th January related to the tractor parade were compared for engagement with the posts on 5th and 6th March (Figure 2). The post engagement on 26th January saw a sudden rise which reduced to only about half on 5th March and dropped further on 6th March. Similarly, three posts by Kisan leader Rakesh Tikait on Facebook made on 26th January were analysed and the highest-ranking post was taken for the consideration of total likes and comments. This was

compared with the post made on 7th March because no post was created from this profile on 5th March (Figure 3). The results showed that the total likes dropped from 20,000 to 3,400, while the total comments came down to 64 from 2,400. However, the data also showed a sudden rise in the post engagement on 8th March as the amount of comments, likes, and shares shot up to 34,000, 1700, and 1400 respectively. This was even higher than the engagement on 26th January and showed that other factors may also have played a role in how people participated in the social media discourse.

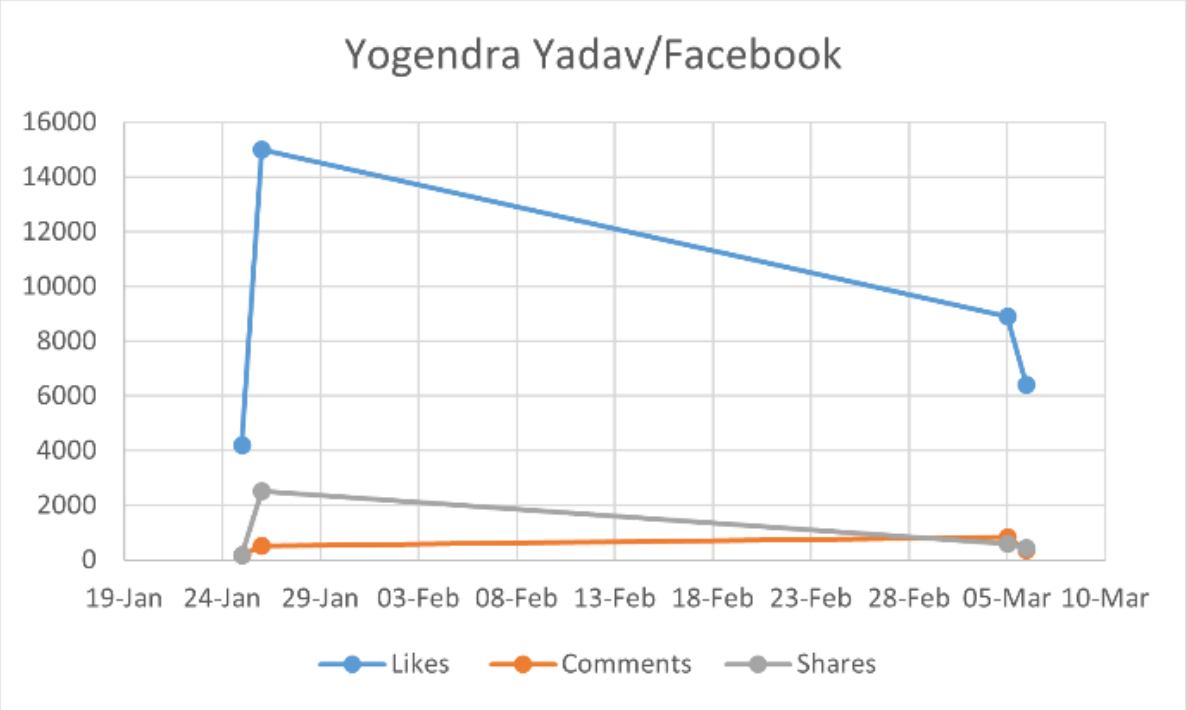


Figure 2*: Likes, comments, and shares on 25th Jan stood at 4200, 170, and 162 respectively. This increased to 15,000, 512, and 2,500 on 26th Jan dropping to 8,900, 834, and 581 on 5th March. On 6th March, the engagement stood at 6,400, 358, and 445.*

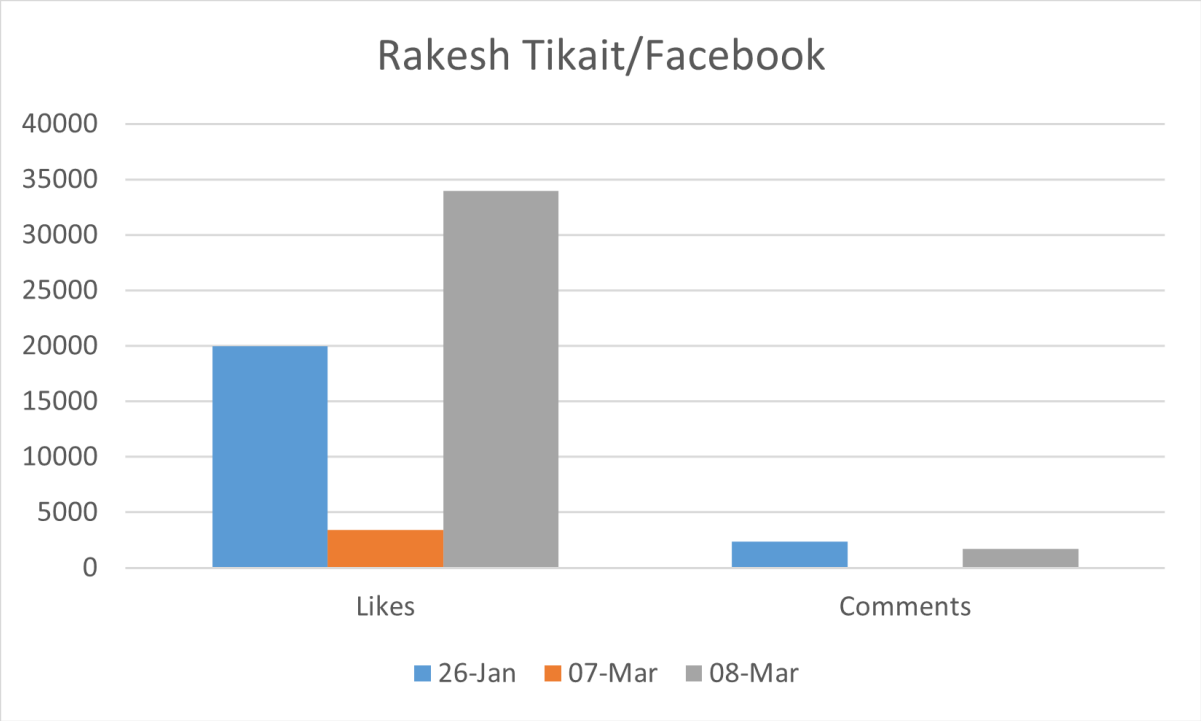


Figure 3*: On 26th January, Rakesh Tikait's post on Facebook saw 20,000 likes and 2,400 comments. This number dropped to 3,400 and 64 on 7th March and then shooting up to 34,000 and 1,700 on 8th March.*

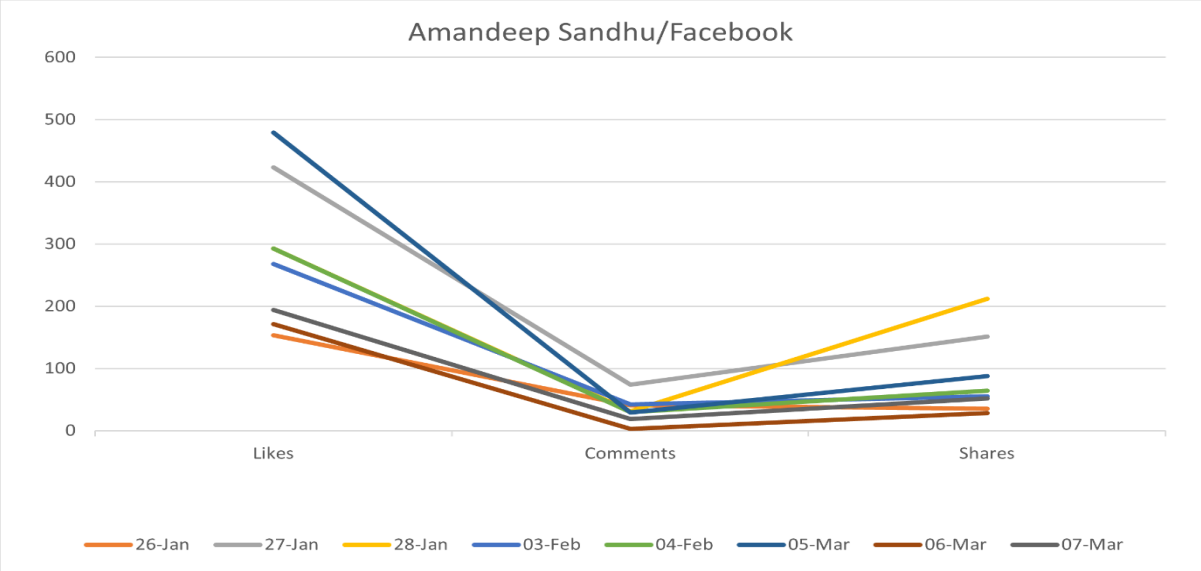


Figure 4*: The post engagement on Facebook increased on the day after Tractor Parade, i.e., 27th January and it kept decreasing in the subsequent days only to go up again on 5th March before another downward slide.*

Lastly, the Facebook posts by Amandeep Sandhu on 26th January were analysed and compared with his posts on 27th and 28th January, 3rd and 4th February, and 5th, 6th, and 7th March. This was done to look at the overall trend of increase or decrease in engagement post the tractor parade event till the 100th day anniversary. The data depicted the following:

26th January – Likes (153) Comments (41) Shares (35)

27th January – Likes (423) Comments (74) Shares (151)

28th January – Likes (293) Comments (31) Shares (212)

3rd February – Likes (268) Comments (42) Shares (55)

4th February – Likes (293) Comments (30) Shares (64)

5 March – Likes (479) Comments (29) Shares (88)

6 March – Likes (171) Comments (3) Shares (28)

7 March – Likes (194) Comments (19) Shares (52)

YouTube engagement

The researchers also looked at the videos posted by six mainstream media organisations on YouTube on 26th January and 5th/6th March related to the events of tractor parade and 100th day anniversary of protest. The goal was to understand how people engaged with the news available on social media and to note the rise or fall in user engagement when the two events were compiled.

Channel Name	Date	Views	Comments
NDTV	26-Jan	2261276	5457
	05-Mar	34894	168
Lallantop	26-Jan	327155	1535
	06-Mar	14516	106
Hindustan Times	26-Jan	78968	478
	06-Mar	2000	32
ABP News	26-Jan	56715	170
	05-Mar	9511	37
Times Now	26-Jan	16388	305
	06-Mar	755	6
Indian Express	26-Jan	113939	263
	06-Mar	6529	58

The above table shows that there was a considerable decline in user engagement on YouTube content of all the media organisations studied for this research. In case of NDTV, the total number of views on 5th March was merely 1.5% of the total views on 26th January. Similarly, the total number of comments on 5th March stood at 3.07% of what it was on 26th January. This trend can be observed for other news channels as well. The researchers included two Hindi news channels, two English news channels, two newspapers, and a digital platform to have a comprehensive understanding of the dataset and the engagement pattern, and the results turned out to be synonymous for all of them.

Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between Social Media Engagement and Fatigue

Engagement Matrix	Kisan Ekta Morcha	Rakesh Tikait	Yogendra Yadav	Amandeep Sandhu
Likes	-0.999	-0.049	-0.959	0.542
Comments	-1.000	-0.731	0.200	-0.743
Views	-1.000	–	–	–
Shares	–	–	-0.998	0.405

For the purpose of correlation analysis, two major events in farmers protests were selected to collect the data. The first event was the tractor parade conducted on 26th January by the farmers in Delhi. The second event was the 100-day anniversary of the protests on 6th March. Facebook posts of Kisan Ekta Morcha, Rakesh Tikait, Yogendra Yadav and Amandeep Sandhu were analyzed for the total number of likes, comments, and views received by them.

On 26th January, the urban audience was for the first time witnessing the farmer protests on such scale, specifically the tractor parade. In previous years, there had been a few protests regarding farmer's issues, but they were not highlighted by the media and the farmers' organizations had also failed to build a strong social media presence. This was the first major event which generated a lot of curiosity and support for the protests. The engagement was high on the Facebook posts of these pages.

However, the march was mired up in controversy after the tractor parade of 26th January. The media was focused on the protests and there was a lot of discussion about the protests on social

media, which led to a kind of information fatigue regarding the farmer's protests. In our survey, 56% of people admitted to an increase in consumption of information regarding the protest after the 26th of January parade. However, the increase in consumption was also accompanied with mental and emotional exhaustion and fatigue setting in. In our survey, around 65% of the respondents accepted that heavy debates and mental exhaustion led to a fatigue towards farmer's protests and caused the respondents to ignore social media posts regarding farmers.

The researchers compared the posts made in on 26th January with the posts made by these pages on March 6 and 7 on their Facebook page. This was done because the pages posted related to the 100th day anniversary on 6th March. Additionally, the engagement of post on 7th March was also analyzed to have a more robust comparison with the engagement on 26th January and to draw strong conclusions.

In our analysis, Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of the relationship between social media engagement and fatigue showed a strong negative relationship. The correlation values for Pearson correlation coefficient (r) range from -1 to +1, in which -1 indicates a perfectly negative linear relationship, 0 indicates no relationship and +1 indicates a perfectly linear positive relationship.

In case of the relationship between fatigue and engagement, this would mean that in a perfectly negative linear relationship when fatigue increases the engagement decreases. In 7 out of 11 matrices, the r value showed a strong negative correlation, and in one case a weak negative relationship. This means, as the fatigue increases, the social media engagement goes down.

Only in one case there was a strong positive relation between fatigue and social media engagement, and in two cases there were positive relationship which can be attributed to the role factors other than fatigue might have played in social media engagement.

2. Sentiment Analysis

The Facebook posts and YouTube videos analysed above were once again used for the sentiment analysis as comments posted by social media users on these posts were randomly selected and compiled together. 50 comments each made on 26th January and 5th March were analysed to understand the dominant sentiment on each day (Figure 5).

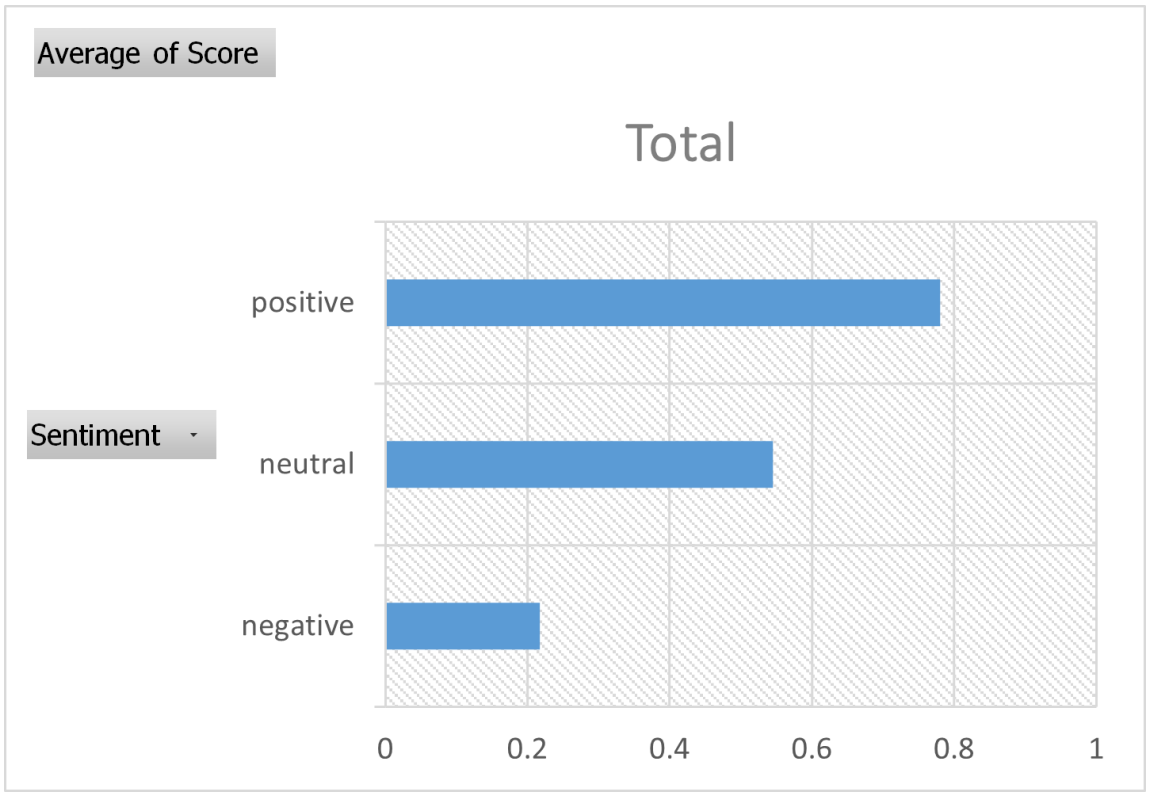


Figure 5*: Average rating as per sentiment analysis for the comments made on 26th January. The negative sentiment averaged at 0.21 and the positive sentiment averaged at 0.78 which shows that both the emotions were expressed abundantly in the respective comments.*

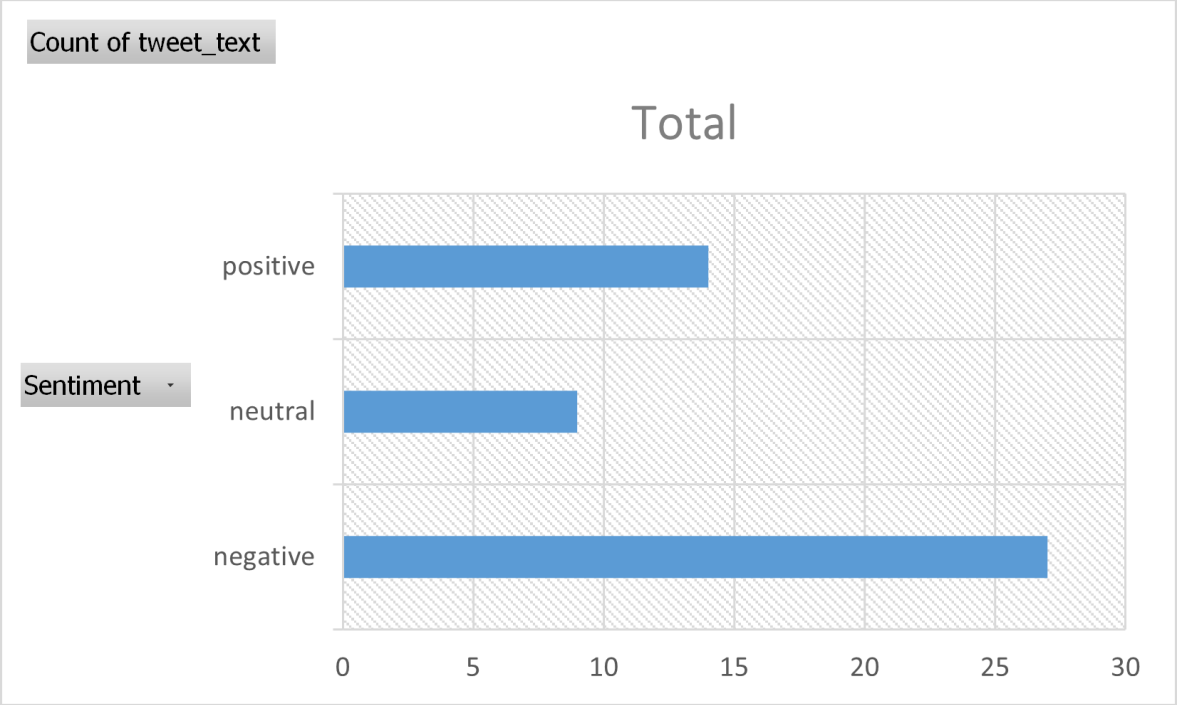


Figure 6*: The total number of negative comments on 26th January was 27 as compared to 14 positive comments from among the 50 comments analysed. A total of 9 comments were neutral which shows that the dominant emotion on the day was more negative.*

The results showed that 54% of the total comments made on 26th January had a negative sentiment while only 28% were positive (Figure 6). The rest were of the comments had a neutral expression or sentiment. Therefore, it can be said that the dominant sentiment of the social media users on the day of tractor parade was negative averaging at a rate of 0.21.

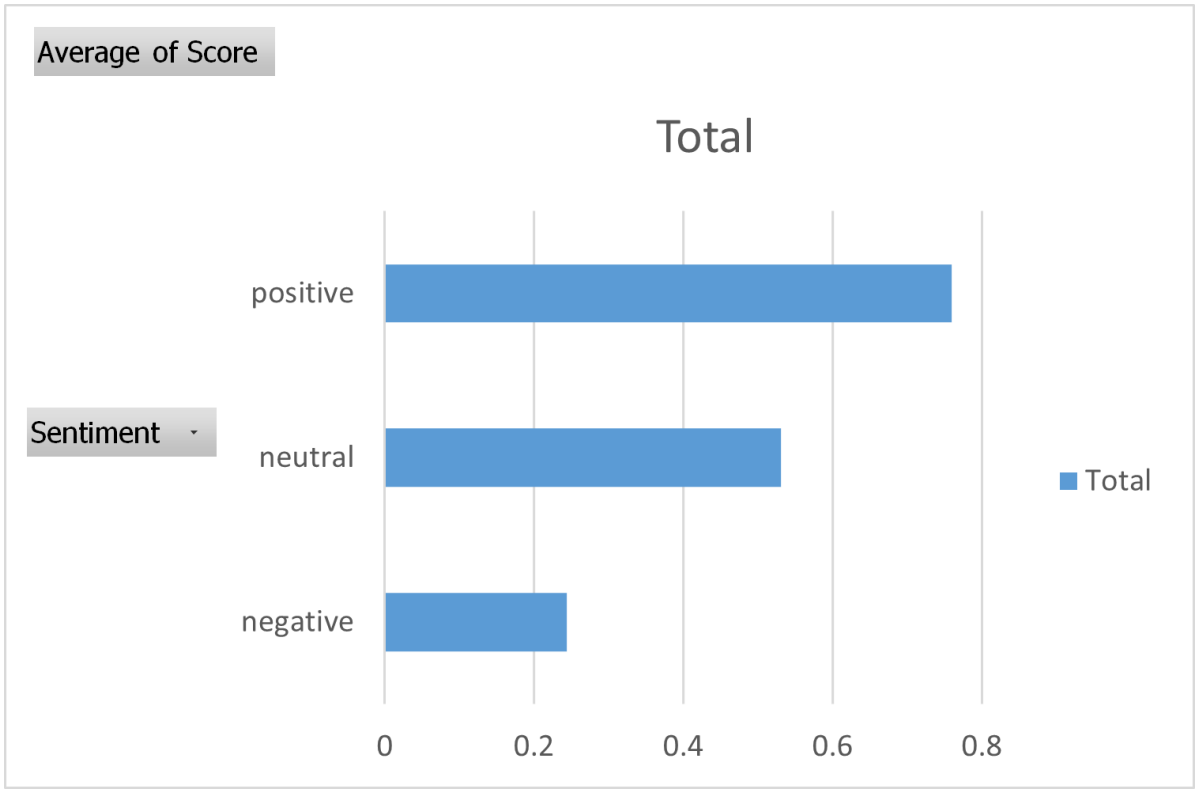


Figure 7*: The negative sentiment averaged at 0.24 on 5th March and the positive sentiment averaged at 0.75.*

On the other hand, the data analysed for 5th March showed that 46% of the total comments were positive as compared to 42% negative comments (Figure 8). The rest of the comments were neutral which showed that the dominant emotion on 5th march was relatively more positive as compared to the emotion on 26th January. The negative emotion on 5th March also averaged at 0.24 which is slightly less negative as compared to the sentiment on 26 January (Figure 7).

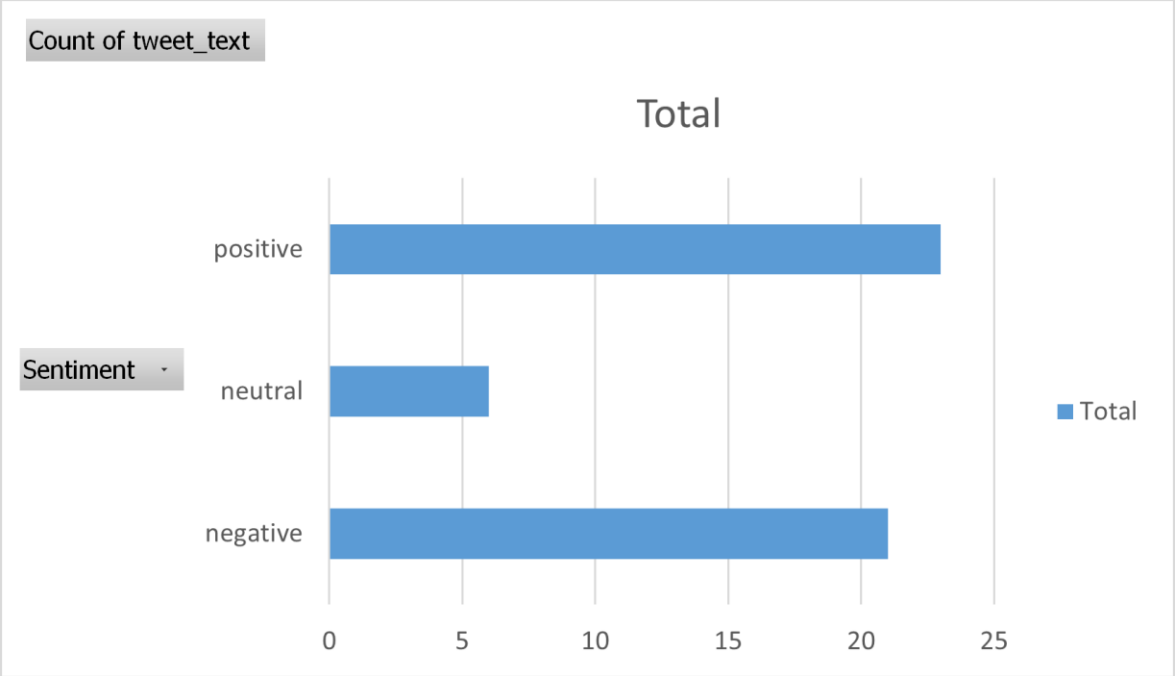


Figure 8*: The total comments with positive sentiment stood at 23 on 5th March which is slightly higher than the 21 comments with negative sentiment.*

To look at the emotions in-depth, this research also looks at the dominant emotions reflected in the user comments on social media platforms. To do this, the researchers identified eight major emotions – four positive and four negatives. The four positive emotions that the researchers observed were love, gratitude, hope, and joy. While the four negative emotions observed were anger, disgust, fear, and sadness. An operational definition was formulated, and a criterion was created to identify these emotions as dominant in the user comments. For example, comments with expressions of warmth, affection, or positive attachment and using words like 'cherish', 'support', etc., were seen as expressing love. Similarly, comments expressing hostility, frustration, and irritation were seen to be reflecting anger as a dominant emotion.

After a thorough manual analysis of 50 comments each from both the dates, i.e. January 26th and March 5th, the researchers found that the negative emotions like anger, disgust, and fear were more dominant as compared to positive emotions on the January event. On the other hand, March 5th saw a decline in the dominance of negative emotions and a slight increase in the positive emotions. Some comments reflected multiple emotions and that wss accounted in the observation and measurement process. For example, out of the 50 comments analysed for January 26th, anger was expressed in 26 of them, disgust in 20, fear in 7, and sadness in 5. At the same time, none of the comments expressed love, while three comments expressed joy, six expressed hope, and only one expressed gratitude.

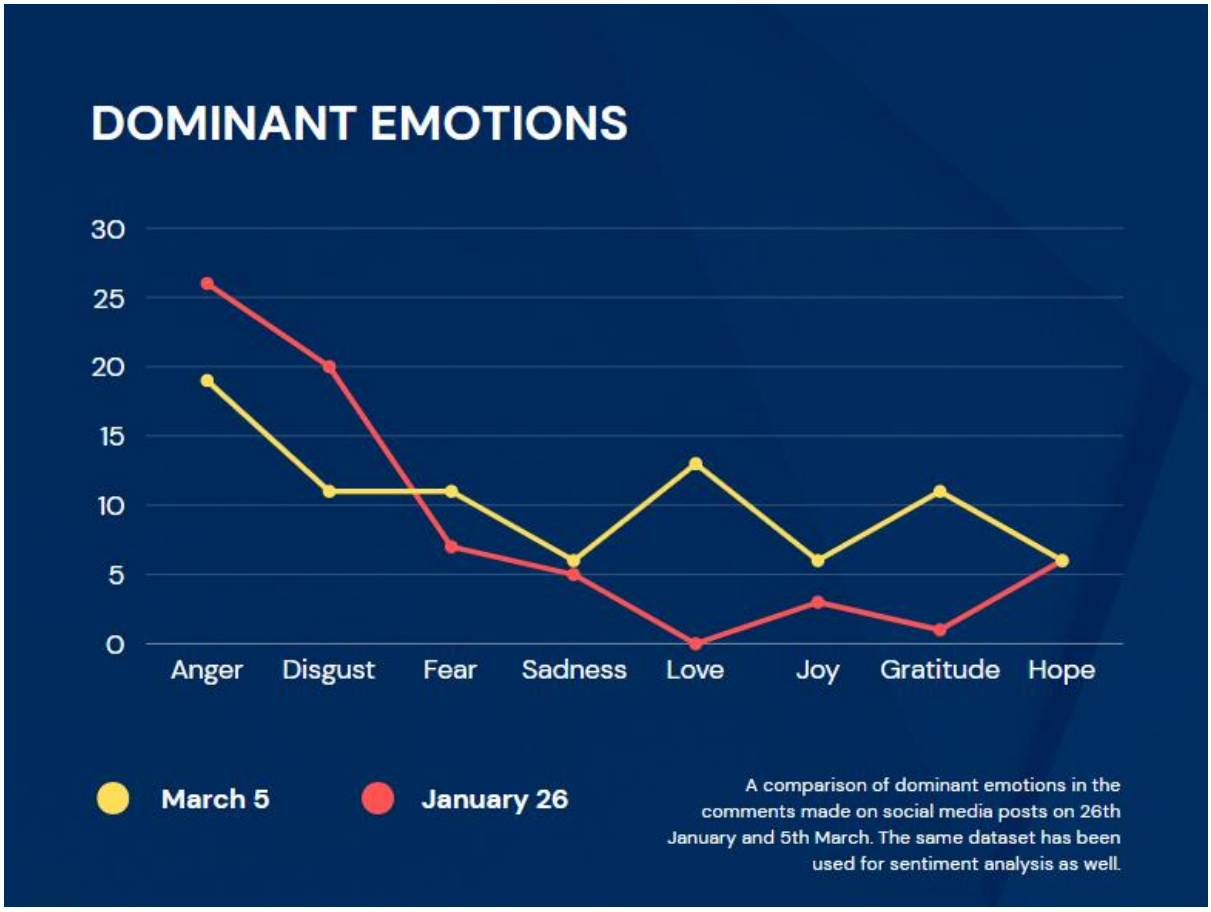
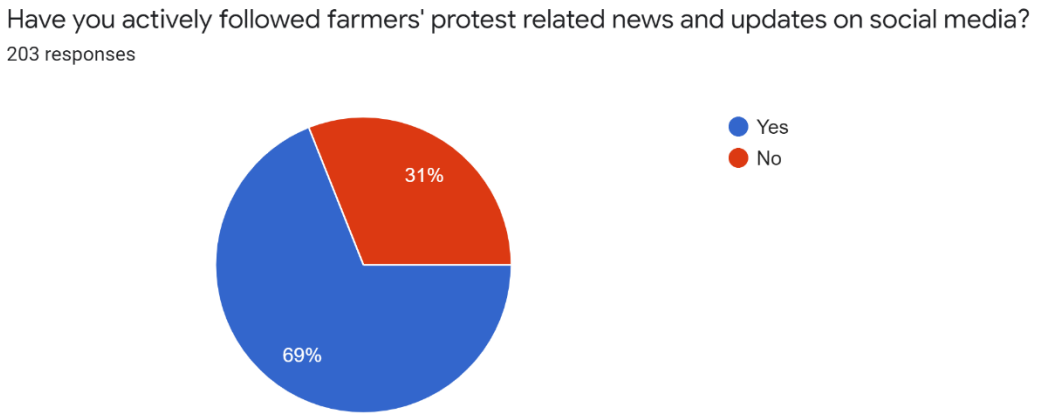


Figure 9*: Negative emotions are observed to be more dominant after January 26th event and positive emotions are observed to be comparatively higher during the 100th anniversary event on March 5th.*

3. Survey Analysis

The final step of analysis was through a questionnaire shared with more than 200 participants who answered questions related to their social media activity, the information they received about farmers' protests through media, the fatigue they experienced, and the change in their offline support for the movement. Out of the total participants, nearly 75% spend up to 4 hours on social media daily and their dominant source of information were Twitter and Instagram.

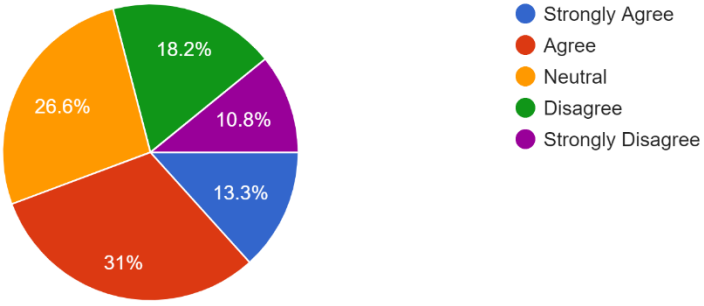


Out of the total 203 participants, 69% stated that they regularly and actively followed the news related to farmers protest on social media which provided a strong foundation to analyse how the increase in information load affected their overall engagement. 41.3% of the total participants also agreed that they were actively involved in the online debates and discussions regarding the protest on social media. This was much higher than the 25.2% participants who disagreed with it. However, only 27.6% participants extended offline support to the movement

in the form of donation of physical participation. This number increased in the aftermath of 26th January tractor parade as 41.4% participants stated that their willingness to extend offline support increased after the event. Additionally, majority of participants also stated that their overall engagement and information consumption increased following the events on 26th January.

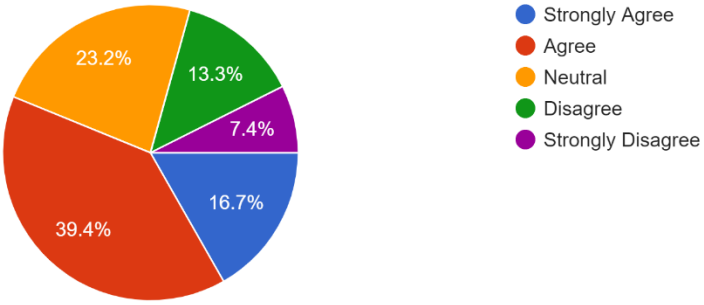
I observed an increase in my social media activity during farmers' tractor parade on 26th January 2021

203 responses



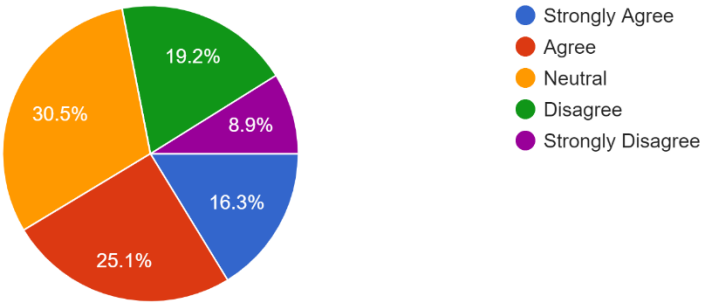
I observed an increase in my consumption of information regarding the protest after 26th January parade

203 responses



I observed an increase in my willingness to extend support to farmers through online engagement or offline support immediately after 26th January tractor parade

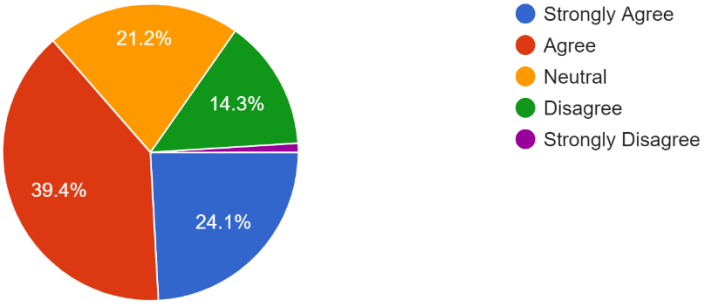
203 responses

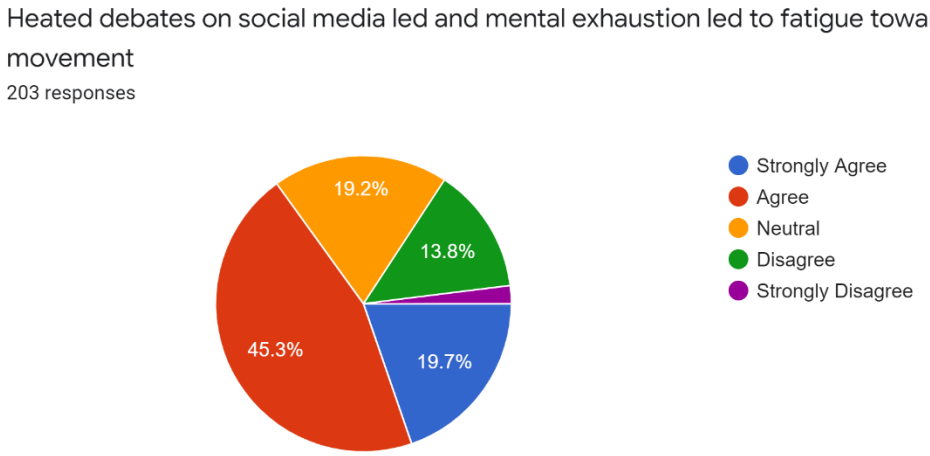


So, what happened in the subsequent days of the tractor parade and the increased debate on social media? The analysis revealed that the user engagement fell significantly which was also supported by the survey as a total of 53.5% of participants agreed that they felt mental exhaustion because of the information overload, and an even bigger 66% of participants said that they experienced fatigue towards the farmers' movement.

I found the online debates and discussions related to protest movements mentally exhausting after a few weeks

203 responses





In a follow-up to this trend, the participants also observed a significant decrease in their social media engagement on 100th day anniversary as compared to the 26th of January parade. 42.8% of participants agreed that it was because of the social media fatigue they experienced. 41.4% of participants also said that this social media fatigue also negatively affected their willingness to extend offline support to the protest movement. Therefore, the individual responses align with the results from the content analysis undertaken.

Results and Discussion

When it comes to information sharing, the high arousal of emotions has been linked with more activity. In addition, it has also been found that content that activates both negative and positive feelings to a high extent is more likely to get viral (Dang-Xuan, 2013). However, it is also proven that people are more likely to notice and engage with negative stimuli as compared to positive and neutral stimuli (Crockett, 2017). This tendency is known as the negativity bias. In this study, the researchers observed a similar trend as with the increase in engagement on 26th January and the subsequent days also came with a dominant negative sentiment in the overall discourse. At the same time, a rise in this emotional distress is also a result of empathy observed for the injustices being meted out to an individual or group (Dean M Krugman, 1996).

Whenever this emotional distress arises, the individuals try to get rid of it either by solving the problem or closing themselves from it (ibid.).

In this study, the relationship between information overload and the people's willingness to either move from social media or withdraw from it has also been found correct. Majority of the people in the study accepted that an increased information consumption and engagement with social media following the 26th of January event caused them to feel mental fatigue which led to subsequent decrease in the overall online and offline support for the movement. This has also been linked with the audience's desire to seek more relevant information while ignoring the non-relevant information, as it may lead to higher social demand, information overload, and resulting social fatigue (Xin Zhang, 2020). This research clearly reflected that this social fatigue caused a decreased engagement when compared between the social media posts made on 26th January and 5th March.

Lastly, the link between online and offline support for the movements is yet to be established in a concrete manner. While the studies in the past lauded social media participation on platforms like Twitter for large-scale offline movements like Arab Spring (Zachary C Steinert-Threlkeld, 2015); in the recent years, it has also been linked with 'slacktivism' and 'clicktivism'. However, the research on correlation between online and offline engagement with protest movements has found mixed results with some scholars discovering a negative correlation while others finding very less correlation between the two (Hedy Greijdanus, 2020). This study found that people were more willing to provide offline support to the protest movement in form of donations and participation when their social media engagement with the information related to protest increased. Similarly, as they withdrew from the social media, their willingness to extend offline support also decreased.

Conclusion

The study concluded that information overload related to the farmers' protest following the events on 26th January caused media fatigue among the audiences, which negatively affected the offline support for the movement by the average social media user. Let's look at how this study addressed each research question:

RQ1: Did the social media users feel tired or exhausted with information related to farmers protest?

The study discovered a positive correlation between information overload during the protests and people's feelings of exhaustion and tiredness.

RQ2: What was the dominant emotion/sentiment during different states of protest and how did it correlate with the social media fatigue?

The study found that the dominant emotion of the people fluctuated during the different phases of the protest. On 26th January, when some protesters barged into the Red Fort complex, the dominant emotion of the people was negative. However, on 5th March, the dominant emotion was found to be positive. Therefore, the study concludes that in the event of predominantly negative news event, the information overload leads to negative emotions among the audience.

RQ3: Does the level of fatigue correlate with reduced support for the movement?

The study could not find a direct correlation between compassion fatigue and a reduced support for the movement. The researcher believes that several other elements may alter an individual's support or opposition to any movement rather than information overload.

RQ4: What are the indicators of reduced support for a protest movement?

The indicators for reduced support for a protest movement are the willingness to consume less information related to the movement through any media platform. Also, it includes an individual's withdrawal from participation in the discourse around a movement through social media.

RQ5: How has people's perception of the movement changed with the change in exposure?

People's perception towards the movement was found to be more complex than their participation in the discourse. An individual may withdraw from participation in the discourse but continue to support the movement. Therefore, a strong correlation between people's perception of the movement and their exposure was not found. However, it has been observed that a reduction in support is likely to cause a negative change in exposure in the beginning.

The study also looked at two theories under its theoretical framework. The findings hint that an overload of information can cause fatigue (compassion fatigue and media fatigue) which pushes the individuals to withdraw from the discourse around an issue which they were initially invested in. Therefore, the Narcotizing Dysfunction theory is found to be correct in context of this study. At the same time, the researcher also found lose connection between people's selective exposure and consumption of content related to a protest movement depending upon their support. However, in the context of social media, an individual's opposition to a movement can also led to selective exposure and consumption. Therefore, this theory is also found to be correct in context of this study. However, more research is required to establish a stronger connection.

Limitations of the Study

The following were the limitations of the study:

While this study analysed the correlation between media fatigue and social media engagement, factors other than information overload and dissonance may be studied in the future research vis-à-vis user engagement. The user survey may not fully account for factors beyond social media like socio-economic background of the participants, personal experiences related to the cause, and logistical challenges faced by individuals. Future studies can explore these confounding variables more comprehensively. Apart from this, the study focuses exclusively on farmers' protest movement, and, because of this specificity, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts and protest movements. Therefore, researchers should exercise caution while extrapolating the results to other movements, regions, or contexts. Lastly, we acknowledge that this research adopts a single case study approach and therefore replicating our analysis across other protest movements would enhance the robustness of our findings. We recommend exploring replication studies across diverse social movements such as environmental activism, labour rights, etc., to address these limitations.

Statement of Intent

The researcher has disclosed no conflict of interest.

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