

The Paradox of Internet Shutdowns: Personal Experience and Public Support in Rural India

Abstract

India, despite being the world's largest democracy, leads the globe in the number of government-imposed internet shutdowns. While internet access is crucial for daily life, there is paradoxically growing public support for these shutdowns. This raises important questions about how individuals form their opinions on internet shutdowns and whether personal experience can alter these beliefs. In this paper, we develop and test an experiential intervention to examine whether personally experiencing an internet shutdown changes individuals' attitudes toward such policies. We recruited 250 participants from rural India and asked them to voluntarily disconnect from the internet for 48 hours. Our results reveal that contrary to expectations, participants did not show a significant shift in their beliefs. In fact, a slight increase in support for internet shutdowns was observed after the intervention. Qualitative feedback suggests that participants often substituted internet use with offline activities, such as spending time with family or focusing on personal development, which may have contributed to this unexpected outcome.

This study highlights the difficulty of changing deeply held beliefs, even when individuals experience firsthand the inconvenience of an internet shutdown. Our findings emphasize the complexity of public opinion on digital rights and governance, suggesting that experiential interventions alone may not be sufficient to shift perspectives. The study contributes to the broader discourse on internet governance and the challenges of addressing public support for internet restrictions.

1 Introduction

India, the world's largest democracy, paradoxically holds the record for the highest number of government-imposed internet shutdowns globally [1]. Despite the internet's integral role in modern society—facilitating communication, access to information, economic activities, and the functioning of democratic processes—there is increasing public support in India for these shutdowns [6]. This raises critical questions about the public's perception of internet freedoms and the impact of such shutdowns on civil liberties.

In this paper, we develop and test an intervention aimed at changing beliefs about internet shutdowns. Our intervention is designed to address the following research question: *Does personally experiencing an internet shutdown alter individuals' perceptions of these government-imposed restrictions?*

Access to the internet is increasingly recognized as a basic human right worldwide. In an era where digital connectivity is essential for daily life, education, commerce, and governance, internet shutdowns not only restrict freedom of expression and access to information but also cause significant economic disruptions and

hinder social progress. These shutdowns are often justified by governments on grounds ranging from curbing dissent to maintaining public order. However, they can undermine democratic principles and have profound effects on individuals' livelihoods and well-being.

Addressing this problem is challenging for several reasons. Changing deeply held beliefs is inherently difficult, especially when they are intertwined with political affiliations, cultural norms, or perceived notions of security and order. Naïve approaches, such as simply presenting information about the negative impacts of shutdowns, may fail to persuade individuals who have not personally felt the effects. Moreover, governments do not impose internet shutdowns randomly; they are often enacted in specific regions during times of unrest, meaning that not all citizens experience them directly. Those unaffected may be more inclined to support shutdowns, perceiving them as necessary for national security, while those who endure them firsthand may recognize the substantial personal and economic costs.

To the best of our knowledge, prior research has not empirically examined whether personal experience with internet shutdowns influences public opinion on the matter. Previous studies have focused on documenting the frequency of shutdowns, their economic impacts, and legal implications [9], but there is a gap in understanding the social and psychological effects on individuals' perceptions and attitudes.

In this study, we recruited 250 participants from rural India to voluntarily give up their internet access for 48 hours. Our goal was to simulate the experience of an internet shutdown and assess whether this personal deprivation would lead to a change in their support for such government policies. Contrary to our expectations, the results showed no significant shift in beliefs post-experience. In fact, we observed a slight increase in support for internet shutdowns after the intervention. Qualitative analysis of participants' voice-recorded accounts suggested that during the shutdown, individuals substituted internet use with offline activities, such as spending time with family, engaging in community events, or focusing on personal development, which may have contributed to the increased support.

Our study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on internet governance and digital freedoms by highlighting the resilience of public attitudes and the complexity of influencing them, even through direct personal impact. The findings suggest that experiential interventions alone may not be sufficient to change beliefs about internet shutdowns. Factors such as cultural context, trust in government, and perceived benefits of disconnection play significant roles in shaping opinions.

While our approach may be limited by its focus on rural India, the considerable challenges in recruiting participants willing to voluntarily give up internet access illustrates the importance of this question, especially given the prevalence of and support for internet

bans. Addressing these limitations present promising avenues for future research.

2 Background and Related work

India, the world's largest democracy, has experienced a dramatic increase in internet usage over the past decade. The advent of affordable mobile internet services, propelled by the widespread adoption of 3G and 4G technologies, has significantly expanded internet penetration across the country, including rural areas. India offers some of the cheapest mobile data rates globally, which has facilitated access for millions of users [12]. The internet has become an indispensable tool for livelihoods, education, communication, and the overall functioning of democracy in India.

Despite the essential role of the internet in daily life, India paradoxically leads the world in government-imposed internet shutdowns. For six consecutive years, India has topped global charts in the number of internet shutdowns [1], surpassing even authoritarian regimes. In 2023 alone, the country recorded 116 instances of internet shutdowns, accounting for 41% of the 283 shutdowns documented worldwide. The duration of these shutdowns has been increasing, with 41% lasting five or more days in 2023, up from 15% in 2022. The longest shutdown occurred in Manipur, lasting 212 days—from May 3 to December 3—with only a brief three-day respite. Kashmir, the contested region in the northern part of India has also had months of internet shut downs [16].

The reasons cited by the Indian government for these shutdowns are varied and, at times, controversial. They include preventing or responding to protests, cheating in exams, communal violence, and other law and order concerns [9]. Notably, internet shutdowns have been imposed to prevent cheating during examinations, affecting the entire population despite only a small subset being involved in these exams. Such broad applications raise questions about the proportionality and necessity of these measures.

The economic and social consequences of these shutdowns are significant. Economically, internet shutdowns cost India \$1.9 billion and \$118 million in foreign investment in the first half of 2023 alone [1]. Socially, shutdowns disproportionately affect vulnerable communities who rely on digital services for social protection measures, access to food, and livelihoods. For many, especially the poorest, not having internet access means losing livelihood opportunities in today's digital age [17].

Internet access in India is not merely a convenience but a necessity. It enables digital payments, access to government services, communication, and educational opportunities. Even in rural areas, people depend heavily on internet connectivity for their daily activities. The pervasive integration of the internet into all facets of life means that shutdowns can have cascading effects on individuals and the economy at large [7, 11].

Despite these adverse impacts, there is widespread public support for internet shutdowns in India. A survey conducted by Lokniti Centre for the Study of Developing Societies found that 56% of the population supports internet shutdowns [6]. This support is often rooted in concerns over national security, the prevention of misinformation, and the maintenance of public order. The paradox of high internet dependence coupled with significant support for

shutdowns underscores the complexity of public opinion on this issue.

The use of internet shutdowns as a tool for law enforcement has been criticized for being disproportionate and for violating human rights norms [4, 10]. Critics argue that such measures impede the exercise of fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression and access to information, which are essential components of a functioning democracy. The frequent and, at times, arbitrary nature of these shutdowns raises critical questions about the balance between security measures and the protection of civil liberties.

In this paper, we aim to explore whether personal experience with internet shutdowns can influence individuals' perceptions and support for such measures. By simulating an internet shutdown, we investigate if firsthand experience of the associated inconveniences and disruptions leads to a greater understanding of the negative impacts on daily life and livelihoods. Our study seeks to determine whether experiential interventions can shift public opinion and foster a more critical evaluation of the use of internet shutdowns in India.

Our primary interest lies in understanding why citizens offer conditional or unconditional support for undemocratic acts, such as internet shutdowns. A growing body of literature in social science explores the reasons behind, ramifications of, and acceptance of undemocratic behavior [8]. Moreover, scholars have examined how environmental cues influence individual decisions and behavior. In particular, research shows that direct exposure to inequality affects individual support for government redistribution [13], the location where people vote has been found to impact their voting behavior [3]. Concurrently, substantial research in information economics and technology examines the impact of internet addiction and its broader implications, often through studies that recruit users to voluntarily relinquish access to social media [2, 5].

We combine these two approaches by recruiting users to voluntarily experience a simulation of internet shutdowns in a setting characterized by a relatively high degree of support for such bans. Our focus on rural India is significant for several reasons. First, India is home to the second-largest population of internet users in the world, following China, with a majority residing in rural areas. Second, a report from Human Rights Watch highlights that access to the internet profoundly influences opportunities for employment, education, and even access to public services [17]. This context makes it crucial to understand the implications and public opinion about internet shutdowns in a country that is increasingly reliant on digital connectivity

3 Design

Study Design. We employed a within-subjects experimental design to investigate whether personally experiencing an internet shutdown influences individuals' support for government-imposed internet shutdowns. Our central hypothesis was that participants who personally undergo such bans adopt a more critical stance toward these policies, potentially resulting in reduced support for internet shutdowns as a governance tool.

To simulate the experience, we asked our recruited participants to voluntarily forego internet access on their smartphones for 48 hours. In recognition of their effort, we compensated participants

with INR 1,000 (approximately USD 12). This amount was determined based on local wage standards and typical recruitment practices in India, ensuring it was sufficient to incentivize participation without exerting undue influence. The intervention aimed to closely replicate the conditions of an actual internet shutdown, enabling us to observe any shifts in attitudes resulting from this firsthand experience.

Participant Recruitment. Participants were recruited from villages in Uttar Pradesh, India using a convenience sampling approach facilitated by a local survey firm that employed a snowball sampling method. The firm initially contacted individuals within various villages, who subsequently recruited participants through their networks. To address the challenges of approaching individuals personally in rural settings, we organized small gatherings in randomly selected locations. During these meetings, we provided a detailed explanation of the study and invited individuals to participate.

The study was conducted during the first and second weeks of August 2024 in various villages across Uttar Pradesh. This region was selected based on logistical considerations and the survey firm's existing network of contacts, which facilitated participant recruitment and data collection. Despite offering competitive compensation relative to local wages, recruitment proved challenging. Internet access is integral to daily life in India, even in rural areas, particularly for essential economic activities such as digital payments. Several individuals were reluctant to disconnect from the internet due to personal and professional dependencies. Many participants either declined to participate or were unable to relinquish internet for the entirety of the 48-hour period, often citing the inconvenience posed by the lack of connectivity. As a result, our final sample consisted of 246 participants, approximately half the number we initially sought, who were less active internet users or who did not heavily rely on digital payments and services. This self-selection presents a limitation to our study and raises concerns about the generalizability of our findings. The survey firm indicated that achieving a larger sample size would have required substantially higher compensation, potentially up to ten times the amount offered. However, such elevated compensation levels could have introduced biases, including experimenter demand effects.

Intervention Procedure. Upon agreeing to participate, each individual underwent a baseline assessment. Surveyors met with participants in person, explained the study protocol, and obtained informed consent. To ensure compliance, we confirmed that participants did not have wireless or wired internet access at home (self-reported), did not require internet access for work during the next two days (for ethical reasons), and did not possess additional internet-enabled devices in their households.

Participants completed a baseline survey that collected demographic information, including age, gender, religion, caste, profession, income, and education level. We also gathered data on political party support, social media platforms used, and current attitudes toward government-imposed internet shutdowns. The full list of survey variables is provided in the Appendix (Section 7.6).

To enforce internet deactivation, we utilized native functionality on participants' Android smartphones. Android devices provide settings to monitor and limit data usage. Surveyors assisted participants in setting a data usage limit of 10 MB, effectively disabling

internet access after minimal use. This method was chosen for its accessibility and simplicity, although it lacks features for easy data export. We relied on participants to provide screenshots of their data usage statistics before and after the intervention. These screenshots served as verification that the internet was deactivated for the study duration. Participants were instructed to return exactly 48 hours later, with a tolerance of two hours. Participants received the first installment of their compensation, totaling 40% of the total payment at this initial meeting.

Surveyors disabled the internet on participants' devices with detailed instructions to refrain from turning it back on unless faced with an emergency during the subsequent 48 hours. To document compliance, participants were required to take screenshots of their data usage before and after the intervention. This process, however, necessitated manual effort from both participants and surveyors. Survey protocols were rigorously adhered to by providing comprehensive training to the surveyors. This training emphasized ethical guidelines and the importance of following the study protocol to ensure the validity of the research. Surveyors were instructed on the necessity of avoiding coercion or bias, and they were trained to conduct the study ethically and respectfully.¹

Follow-up and Data Collection. At the end of the 48-hour period, participants reconvened with surveyors to complete the endline survey. This survey included the same questions on support for internet shutdowns as the baseline survey, allowing for within-subject comparisons of any changes in attitudes. Surveyors also verified compliance by comparing current data usage statistics with the baseline screenshots. Participants who had used more than 10 MB of data during the intervention were considered non-compliant and were excluded from the final analysis.

Finally, participants were asked to record an audio message detailing their experiences during the internet shutdown and to explain whether and how their opinions on internet shutdowns had changed. This qualitative data collection aimed to enhance the understanding of the quantitative findings by providing valuable insights into personal reflections and contextualizing participants' attitudes toward internet shutdowns. After verifying compliance and completing the endline survey, participants received the remaining 60% of their compensation. Surveyors then assisted in reactivating internet access on their smartphones by adjusting the data usage settings.

Data Verification and Compliance. To ensure data integrity, we implemented several verification procedures. Timestamps on the data usage screenshots were randomly examined to confirm they corresponded to the expected timeframes. We also cross-referenced reported data usage with device settings to detect any discrepancies. Compliance was exceptionally high, with only three participants failing to adhere to the protocol due to emergencies that necessitated internet use. These individuals were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, we obtained screenshots showing activity metrics (e.g., number of notifications and the frequency of phone unlocks) as proxies for phone usage and compliance. There was a significant drop in both the number of notifications and the frequency of phone unlocks (see Figure 15 in the Appendix), which

¹The study protocol was reviewed and approved by our Institutional Review Board (IRB).

indicated compliance and highlighted the importance of internet access in daily life before relinquishing internet during the study period.

4 Results

4.1 Exploratory data analysis

The sample we obtained was heavily self selected and was biased demographically. 93% of the respondents were male (Figure 6), almost all of them (99%) were Hindu (Figure 7), a majority of them supported the current ruling party, the BJP (Figure 10). We obtained a good spread in terms of age (Figure 6), and caste (Figure 7). The distributions for various other demographic variables (Figures 6–10) as well as social media platform usage (Figure 12) and overall data usage stats (Figure 13) are shown in the Appendix.

4.2 Baseline Support for internet shutdowns

Our baseline survey findings revealed that support for government-imposed internet shutdowns was exceedingly high among participants, with over 80% expressing approval (see Figure 1). This finding aligns with previous surveys indicating substantial public endorsement (over 55%) of such measures [6]. The elevated levels of support in our sample may be attributed to its skew towards supporters of the right-wing ruling party, as detailed in Section 3. This sample composition potentially amplifies pro-government sentiments, which may affect the generalizability of our findings.

Impact of the Simulated internet shutdown on Beliefs. The primary objective of our intervention was to evaluate the efficacy of a simulated internet shutdown in altering participants' beliefs about government-led internet shutdowns. We hypothesized that personally experiencing the inconvenience of an internet shutdown would decrease support and/or increase opposition to such measures.

Contrary to our expectations, the intervention resulted in an increase in support and a decrease in opposition to internet shutdowns. As illustrated in Figure 1, there was a 3.6% increase in participants expressing support and a 2.4% decrease in those opposing government-imposed internet shutdowns.² This outcome suggests that the intervention not only failed to reduce support but may have inadvertently reinforced participants' approval of internet shutdowns.

To delve further, we examined the transitions in participants' beliefs from baseline to endline. Figure 2 presents a transition matrix where each row corresponds to the baseline support level and each column represents the endline support level.

An overwhelming 95% of participants who supported internet shutdowns at baseline continued to support them even after the intervention. Among participants who were neutral at baseline, 50% shifted to supporting internet shutdowns at endline. Finally, 46% of those who initially opposed internet shutdowns changed their stance to support in the endline. These transitions indicate a general trend toward increased support for internet shutdowns, even among those who were previously neutral or opposed. The

intervention, rather than diminishing approval, appears to have reinforced or elevated support across different participant groups.

We hypothesize the reasons for these results in Section 5.

4.3 Demographics and internet shutdowns

To understand whether the change in beliefs about government-imposed internet shutdowns vary across different segments of the population, we analyzed the data based on various demographic factors and personal experiences.

4.3.1 Demographic Groups and Expectations. We considered the following demographic variables collected during our baseline survey:

Political Affiliation. We classified participants based on their support for the incumbent party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Given that the BJP is the incumbent political party at both the federal level and in the state where our study was conducted, supporters of the BJP (65% of our sample, as shown in Figure 10) might have stronger alignment with government policies. We anticipated that BJP supporters would maintain or even increase their support for internet shutdowns, viewing them as necessary measures implemented by their preferred government.

Age. Participants were divided into two age groups: *Young* (under 35 years, comprising 66% of our sample) and *Old* (35 years and above, making up 34%). Younger individuals are generally more reliant on the internet for communication, information, and entertainment [15], leading us to expect that they would be more affected by the internet shutdown and thus more likely to oppose it after the intervention.

Education. We divided participants into those who completed beyond secondary school (47% of our sample) and others.

Income. We divided participants based on their annual income into two groups: those earning over 100,000 INR (approximately 1,250 USD, representing 49% of our sample) and those earning less.

Caste. Caste is a salient cleavage in Indian society, that is strongly correlated with socio-economic status. Therefore, participants were categorized into *Upper Caste* (54% of the sample) and *Other Castes* (46%).³

Profession. Participants were categorized based on their occupation into *Farming* (63% of the sample) and *Other Professions*.

For Education, Income, Caste and Profession, we anticipated that individuals in these higher education, with more income, from higher castes and in non farming professions rely more on internet [6], and hence would exhibit a greater decrease in support for internet shutdowns after experiencing the intervention.

4.3.2 Polarization and Personal Experience. In addition to demographic variables, we included the following variables:

Political Polarization. We measured participants' expressed feelings towards supporters of other political parties using a 'feeling thermometer' scale from [2], ranging from 0 to 100. Ratings between 50 and 100 indicate favorable feelings, while ratings between 0 and 50 indicate unfavorable feelings. We expected that individuals with lower polarization (i.e., more favorable views towards opposing parties) might be more open to changing their beliefs about internet shutdowns after the intervention.

²In all figures, 'Strongly support' and 'Somewhat support' are combined into 'Support,' while 'Strongly oppose' and 'Somewhat oppose' are combined into 'Oppose.' The overall trends remain consistent when analyzing these categories separately. Detailed plots with all five categories are provided in the Appendix in Section 7.5.

³"upper" castes refer to those who are at the top of traditional Hindu caste hierarchy.

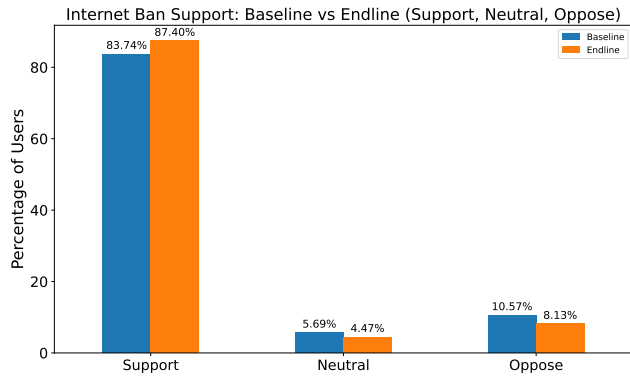


Figure 1: Baseline and Endline Support

Self-Reported Experience. Participants provided qualitative feedback on their experience during the internet shutdown (as detailed in Section 4.5). We categorized these experiences into *Good* and *Bad*. We anticipated that participants who reported negative experiences would be more likely to decrease their support for internet shutdowns.

4.3.3 Results and Observations. Table 1 summarizes the changes in support for internet shutdowns across the different demographic groups and experiences. The overall trend mirrors our main findings: most sub-populations exhibited a slight increase in support for internet shutdowns after the intervention. Contrary to our expectations, both younger and older participants showed an increase in support for internet shutdowns. Notably, the change was slightly higher among the younger group, suggesting that even those who might be more dependent on the internet did not decrease their support after experiencing the ban.

That said, we observed a significant divergence between BJP supporters and non-supporters. BJP supporters exhibited a substantial increase in support for internet shutdowns, reflecting their alignment with government policies. In contrast, participants who did not support the BJP showed minimal change or even a slight decrease in support, indicating a strong correlation between political affiliation and perceptions of government policies. This was further evidenced by our polarization metrics, where participants with lower levels of polarization (more favorable views towards other political parties) displayed a decrease in support for internet shutdowns.

Surprisingly, participants who reported negative experiences during the internet shutdown still exhibited an increase in support for such bans. This counterintuitive result suggests that personal inconvenience did not necessarily translate into decreased support, possibly due to overriding factors such as political party preferences or beliefs about the “greater good”. Finally, while participants occupied in farming showed a slight decrease in support for internet shutdowns where as other professions did not, contradicting our expectations. This may indicate that occupational dependence on the internet did not significantly affect attitudes towards internet shutdowns. Additionally, we did not observe any significant differences in trends for Caste, Income and Education.

Table 1: Summary of Results

	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Party	BJP		Other	
	12.07	-10.34	1.06	0.00
Age	18-34 years		>35 years	
	4.96	-2.13	1.05	-2.11
Education	Over Secondary school		Below Secondary school	
	4.88	-2.47	2.45	-2.44
Income	>100,000 INR		<100,000 INR	
	2.63	-3.95	4.12	-1.76
Caste	Upper Caste		Other	
	1.97	-0.66	6.38	-5.32
Profession	Farming		Other	
	-1.47	0.74	10.00	-6.36
Polarization	High		Low	
	0.81	-2.21	-1.55	1.97
Experience	Good		Bad	
	6.25	-2.08	4.55	-3.03

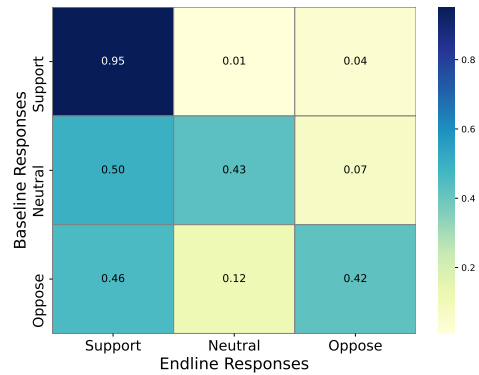


Figure 2: Heatmap showing the changes in baseline support.

4.4 Support for internet shutdown for other reasons

In addition to assessing overall support for government-imposed internet shutdowns, we explored participants’ attitudes toward internet shutdowns implemented for specific purposes. We asked whether they supported internet shutdowns to: (i) prevent protests, (ii) prevent terrorism, (iii) prevent cheating in exams,⁴ (iv) prevent communal riots, and (v) during elections. Table 2 shows the results. The results reveal several interesting patterns:

First, there was a substantial increase in support for internet shutdowns that were aimed at preventing religious riots (+4.31%) and a moderate increase for preventing terrorism (+0.76%). The heightened support for preventing religious riots may reflect the generally low levels out-group trust in rural India. However, we refrain from drawing stronger conclusions regarding this finding due to the idiosyncratic nature of our sample.

⁴A common reason cited for internet shutdowns is to prevent cheating and ensure exam integrity [14].

Table 2: Difference in support for other purposes

	Support	Oppose
Prevent protests	0.28	0.02
Prevent terrorism	0.76	0.45
Prevent cheating in exams	-1.11	3.82
Prevent communal riots	4.31	-0.72
Prevent cheating in elections	-1.27	3.15

Next, we observed decreased levels of support for scenarios where the users might have been personally impacted by, either during our intervention or in their personal lives. Notably, support for internet shutdowns aimed at preventing cheating in exams decreased by 1.11%, while support for bans during elections declined by 1.27%. This decline was accompanied by significant increases in opposition (+3.82% and +3.15%, respectively). We posit that these scenarios likely have a direct personal impact on individuals, as they can interfere with daily activities, communication, and access to essential services during critical periods such as examinations and elections.⁵ Since approximately 40% of the sample reported spending time on work or study (as shown in Figure 3), an internet shutdown during exam periods could disrupt academic pursuits, access to educational resources, and timely communication with educators and peers.

4.5 Qualitative Findings

To gain deeper insights into participants' experiences during the simulated internet shutdown, we conducted qualitative interviews. Participants were asked to record audio accounts responding to the following questions: "Please share your experience living without the internet for the past two days. What did you do instead of using the internet? How did you feel?" The recordings were in hindi, that we transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding to identify common themes and patterns in their responses.

4.5.1 Activities During the internet shutdown. The majority of participants reported engaging in routine offline activities during the internet shutdown. Many occupied themselves with work-related tasks such as farming, household chores, and professional responsibilities. Some participants used the opportunity to focus on studies or complete pending tasks. A summary of their reported activities is presented in Figure 3, and their overall experiences are summarized in Figure 32. As we can see from Figure 3, most participants focused on other activities such as work/study, offline entertainment like watching movies/reading or finishing up household chores. Some participants described their feelings without explicitly mentioning specific activities, resulting in some unknowns in the data.

Positive Experiences and Increased Productivity. For many individuals, the absence of the internet had minimal impact on their daily lives and even led to positive outcomes. The lack of digital distractions allowed them to concentrate more on their work, personal responsibilities, and relationships, resulting in feelings of productivity and satisfaction. Several participants reported using the internet-free period to strengthen family bonds, engage in community activities, and focus on personal development. One participant mentioned, *I used to spend time on the phone all day, but*

after switching off the internet, I spent time with my loved ones and family highlighting a newfound appreciation for offline interactions. Another reflected, I spared more time for my family and home. I concentrated on works which I used to ignore while using internet. I felt it good. A different participant stated, *I utilized the spare time in my work and finished all my pending jobs. It was good without internet as I adjusted that time in my other jobs.*, indicating a positive shift in priorities and time management.

Negative Experiences and Feelings of Disconnection. Conversely, 27% of the participants experienced discomfort and a sense of disconnection without internet (see Figure 32). The inability to communicate with friends on social media or access online services—particularly for payments—led to feelings of isolation and inconvenience. Practical challenges were noted, such as difficulties with online financial transactions and missing out on real-time events like cricket matches. One participant expressed, *Without internet, we are disconnected from the world. It was a difficult period without internet.* Another shared, *I did not feel good without internet as I was not connected to my friends on social media.*, expressing the importance of the internet in maintaining social and informational connections.

4.5.2 Impact on Perceptions of internet shutdowns. Despite the varied experiences, the simulated internet shutdown did not significantly change participants' perceptions regarding government-imposed internet shutdowns. As discussed in Section 4.2, participants' beliefs remained largely unchanged. To explore this further, we asked: "Does living without the internet change your perceptions of governments banning the internet?" Analysis of the responses revealed two main themes:

Unchanged Beliefs Due to Minimal Impact. Some participants did not feel troubled by the lack of internet and therefore did not alter their beliefs about government bans. One participant stated, *If the government bans it, that must be for our benefit only. So that won't change my belief.* Interestingly, even participants who reported negative experiences did not necessarily change their stance. This suggests a level of acceptance or trust in governmental decisions.

Acceptance Despite Discomfort. Other participants acknowledged the difficulties of living without the internet but still supported government bans for various reasons, such as trust in governmental actions or nostalgia for simpler times. One participant remarked, *It did not affect my belief. The involvement of internet in our life is too excessive. It's now necessary to use internet only for essential things.* Another noted, *It was difficult, but if the government bans it, I can get used to it. After all, I lived without internet for a lot of years.* These responses reflect a belief that while the internet is convenient, its absence is manageable and perhaps even beneficial.

Some participants supported partial or temporary bans during emergencies but opposed permanent restrictions. One individual explained, *If the internet is banned for a short period during emergencies, it's okay. But it will definitely affect my belief if it is banned forever. It hampers our daily jobs.* Another participant echoed this sentiment, *I do not support a full internet shutdown, but if it is essential for the government for a short period of time, then it's okay.*

Overall, the simulated internet shutdown elicited a spectrum of responses, reflecting the complex relationship individuals have with digital connectivity. While some participants appreciated the

⁵With over 80% of our sample reporting that they voted in the last election (see Figure 10), electoral participation is evidently important for our participants.

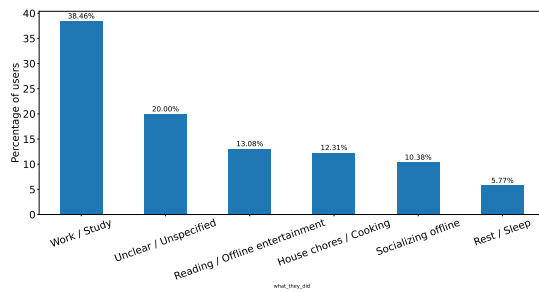


Figure 3: What the users did during the intervention period.

opportunity to focus on offline activities and strengthen personal relationships, others experienced significant inconvenience and isolation. Given that our sample was highly biased and heavily self-selected for low internet dependence (as indicated in Section 3), the fact that 27% felt inconvenient shows the importance of the internet in daily life. Nonetheless, participants' perceptions of government-imposed internet shutdowns remained largely unchanged, highlighting a potential acceptance of such measures or a belief in their necessity under certain circumstances.

4.6 Changes in happiness and life satisfaction

To assess the impact of the internet shutdown on participants' well-being, we measured changes in self-reported happiness and life satisfaction before and after the two-day period without internet access. This approach mirrors the methodology used by Allcott et al. [2], who evaluated the welfare effects of social media deactivation. Participants responded to standardized questions using Likert scales: a four-point scale for happiness and a five-point scale for life satisfaction (see Appendix 7.6 for the full questionnaire).

The measures presented indicate the percentage change in participants reporting each level of happiness and life satisfaction between the baseline (before the internet shutdown) and the endline (after the internet shutdown). Figure 4 illustrates these results.

Our findings reveal a noticeable decline in both happiness and life satisfaction following the internet shutdown. Specifically, there was a 3% decrease in participants reporting that they were happy and a 3.5% increase in those reporting unhappiness. Similar shifts were observed in life satisfaction ratings, with a decrease in those feeling satisfied and an increase in those feeling dissatisfied.

These effects contrast with the results of Allcott et al. [2], who found that deactivating Facebook for four weeks led to improvements in well-being, including reduced anxiety and increased life satisfaction. In their study, participants could substitute Facebook with other internet activities, possibly mitigating negative effects. In our study, however, the complete shutdown of internet access eliminated such substitution possibilities, potentially amplifying the impact on well-being.

The significant decrease in happiness and life satisfaction after just a two-day internet shutdown is surprising and indicates the integral role of the internet in daily life. Unlike the partial social media deactivation studied by Allcott et al. [2], our participants experienced a total disconnection from all online services, including communication platforms, entertainment, and essential utilities like online payments. These findings highlight the importance of

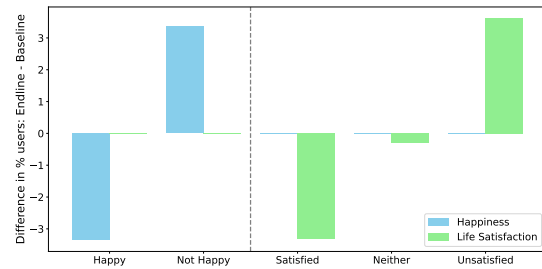


Figure 4: Change in Happiness and Life satisfaction

the internet not only as a source of information and communication but also as a contributor to overall well-being. The negative effects observed, even over a short duration, suggest that internet shutdowns can have immediate and significant impacts on people's happiness and life satisfaction. This emphasizes the need to carefully consider the welfare implications of internet shutdowns and motivates further research into strategies to mitigate their adverse effects. By demonstrating that even a brief internet shutdown can decrease well-being, our study contributes to the broader understanding of the social and psychological importance of digital connectivity. It further calls attention to the potential costs associated with government-imposed internet restrictions and the necessity of balancing security concerns with the societal welfare.

Similarly, we examined changes in perceived polarization towards opposing viewpoints, utilizing the measures from [2]. Our analysis did not reveal any significant difference between the baseline and endline polarization levels ($p = 0.69$), as depicted in Figure 33 in Appendix 7.5. Notably, the baseline polarization score was relatively low at 70, indicating that participants were not highly polarized to begin with.

5 Reasons for the Intervention's Failure

Despite our efforts to simulate an internet shutdown by asking participants to deactivate their internet access for two days, the intervention did not yield the expected decrease in support for government-imposed internet shutdowns. Instead, support remained the same or even increased among participants. Several factors may explain this counterintuitive outcome, which we discuss below.

Adaptation and Resilience. One possible reason for the intervention's failure is the participants' ability to quickly adapt to the short duration of the internet shutdown. Our original design intended for a week-long deactivation, but practical constraints made it unfeasible. Extending the duration would have posed significant challenges, including increased compensation demands from participants due to their dependence on internet connectivity, even in rural India. Additionally, ethical considerations regarding prolonged disconnection limited our ability to extend the intervention period.

As a result, the two-day duration may have been insufficient for participants to fully experience the negative consequences associated with extended internet shutdowns. In real-world scenarios, more than 40% of internet shutdowns last at least five days [1], and the typical internet shutdown in India lasts several days. The short intervention likely led participants to underestimate the impacts of longer-term bans, as they did not encounter the cumulative effects

of prolonged disconnection. Participants easily found alternative ways to occupy their time, such as engaging in offline activities like work/study, household chores, or spending time with family. As one participant noted, engaging in these activities provided a sense of fulfillment, which could mitigate any negative feelings about the lack of internet access.

Moreover, knowing that the internet would be restored after two days may have lessened the perceived severity of the ban. This temporary adaptation could lead participants to underestimate the negative impacts of longer-term bans, as they did not experience significant disruptions or miss critical information and opportunities. Interestingly, some participants discovered personal benefits during the internet shutdown, such as increased productivity, better focus, or enhanced interpersonal interactions, which may have inadvertently increased their support for internet shutdowns.

Study Context and Trust in Government. The intervention took place in a region where the state government is led by the same party as the federal government (BJP). This political alignment may have strengthened the association between government actions and party loyalty. Participants who support the ruling party might be more inclined to view internet shutdowns as justified and necessary, reinforcing their support even when experiencing inconvenience.

Participants may perceive government-imposed internet shutdowns as legitimate actions taken to ensure national security, curb misinformation, or maintain social order. This perceived legitimacy can result in continued or increased support for internet shutdowns, as participants believe that such measures are in the best interest of society as a whole. High levels of trust in government decisions can lead to acceptance of policies like internet shutdowns, even when they cause personal inconvenience. Questioning or opposing government actions might be culturally discouraged, contributing to increased support for government policies despite negative personal experiences.

Sample Bias and Selection Effects. Our sample's characteristics may have significantly influenced the results. As detailed in Section 3, the sample was skewed toward supporters of the ruling party, with 65% identifying as BJP supporters, mostly men and dominated by farmers. This political homogeneity could amplify the observed increase in support for internet shutdowns, as participants are predisposed to align with government actions. Additionally, the perception of the government being synonymous with the BJP may have reinforced this bias. Furthermore, the recruitment process may have led to a self-selection bias. Participants willing to deactivate their internet access for the study might already have lower internet dependence or usage. Qualitative interviews revealed that many participants were low internet users at baseline, often engaged in occupations like farming that do not require constant connectivity. As a result, the intervention's impact on their daily lives was minimal, and they were less likely to oppose internet shutdowns due to a lack of significant disruption.

The difficulty in recruiting participants who are highly dependent on the internet illustrates this bias. Many potential participants declined to participate or demanded significantly higher compensation, highlighting the challenges in obtaining a representative sample. Consequently, the findings may not generalize to populations with higher internet dependence, who might react differently to an actual internet shutdown.

6 Conclusion and Learnings

The unexpected outcome from our study provided several important insights into the complexities of public opinion on internet shutdowns and the factors influencing it.

The Essential Role of the Internet in Daily Life. First, our study highlights the indispensable role of the internet, even among a highly biased and self-selected sample from rural India. We found high penetration and substantial internet usage, with users consuming tens of gigabytes of mobile data monthly in rural settings. The internet is intimately tied to daily livelihoods, education, communication, and access to information. Yet, the high degree of support for internet shutdowns suggests a complex relationship between personal needs and public opinion.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations of Experiential Interventions. Second, we learned that designing interventions that simulate internet shutdowns present significant practical and ethical challenges. Asking participants to disconnect from the internet for extended periods is not only impractical – given their reliance on connectivity – but also raises ethical concerns. Given the dependence of internet for basic necessities, and the high cost of recruiting a representative sample highlights the challenges in credibly estimating the effects of internet shutdowns and public perceptions about the same

Ineffectiveness of Experiential Interventions Alone. Third, the study highlighted the ineffectiveness of experiential interventions alone in changing deeply held beliefs. The overall increase in support for internet shutdowns across most demographics suggests that simply experiencing an internet shutdown is insufficient to alter opinions, even among those who faced inconvenience. This finding illustrates the complexity of measuring public opinion, which is often intertwined with political belief, cultural norms, and trust in authority. Some participants in our study hinted at rationalizing the inconvenience as a necessary sacrifice for greater societal benefits.

Perceived Legitimacy and Necessity of internet shutdowns. Fourth, we observed that participants evaluate internet shutdowns through the lens of perceived legitimacy and necessity. Support for internet shutdowns was higher when associated with preventing serious threats to public safety, such as terrorism and religious riots. Participants appear to prioritize collective well-being over personal inconvenience when they believe the measures serve a greater good. Conversely, decreased support for internet shutdowns during exams and elections highlights the impact of personal experience and direct effects on daily life. These events are personally significant and recurring; disruptions due to internet shutdowns are more keenly felt and may be viewed as disproportionate or unjustified. Participants may perceive such bans as interfering with essential personal and civic activities, leading to increased opposition. This contrast suggests that public support for internet shutdowns is nuanced and highly context-dependent.

The unexpected results in our study emphasize the need to understand the nuanced perspectives of individuals toward internet shutdowns. In an increasingly connected world, balancing security concerns with the protection of civil liberties presents considerable challenges for policymakers and citizens alike. Understanding citizen views and potentially shifting them toward pro-democratic norms offers promising avenues for future research

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7 Appendix

7.1 Protocol

7.1.1 Baseline.

(1) **Step 1: Limit Access to Data**

We tell people to not use their internet and set the limit to something small, say 10 MB. This will turn off mobile data automatically (but it's easy to re-enable it if they are savvy).

- Go to **Settings**. Search for *Data warning*.
- Enable the *Set data limit* button.
- Select *Data limit*. Enter **10 MB**.
- See Figure 5 (a).

(2) **Step 2: Monitor Data Usage**

We tell them that we can monitor their usage and show the data usage page and take a screenshot of it.

- Go to **Settings**. Search for *App data usage*.
- Select *App data usage*.
- Take a screenshot.
- Scroll down and take screenshots covering all apps⁶.
- See Figure 5 (b).

(3) **Step 3: Enable App Usage Page and Take Screenshot**

- Go to **Settings**. Search for *Digital Wellbeing*.
- Select *Digital Wellbeing & Parental Controls* (might be called *Digital Wellness* on some phones).
- Select *Dashboard*. Open settings and provide Usage access to *Digital Wellbeing*.
- Take a screenshot of the page.
- See Figure 5 (c).

7.1.2 Endline.

- (1) We take a screenshot again of their data usage page (see **Step 2** above) and if they didn't use any new data, we provide them with the incentive.
- (2) We take a screenshot of the app usage page to check usage (see **Step 3** above).
- (3) Photo of **Settings** → **About Phone**.

7.2 Demographics plots

We show plots indicating the age, gender (Figure 6), religion, caste (Figure 7), profession, income (Figure 8), household size, amount spent on data (Figure 9), whether they voted, and party voted (Figure 10).

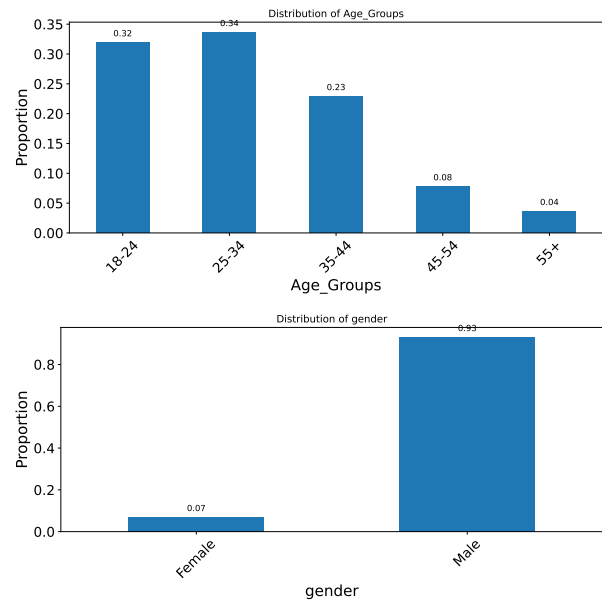


Figure 6: Age Groups and Gender Distribution

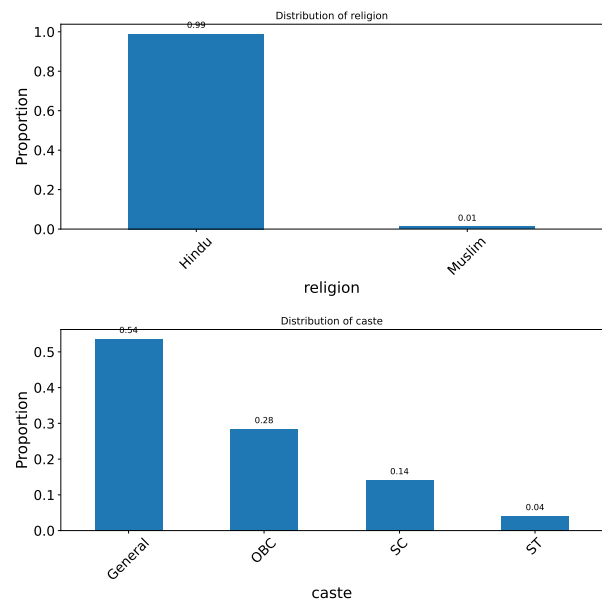


Figure 7: Religion and Caste Distribution

⁶Cover all apps in multiple screenshots if necessary.

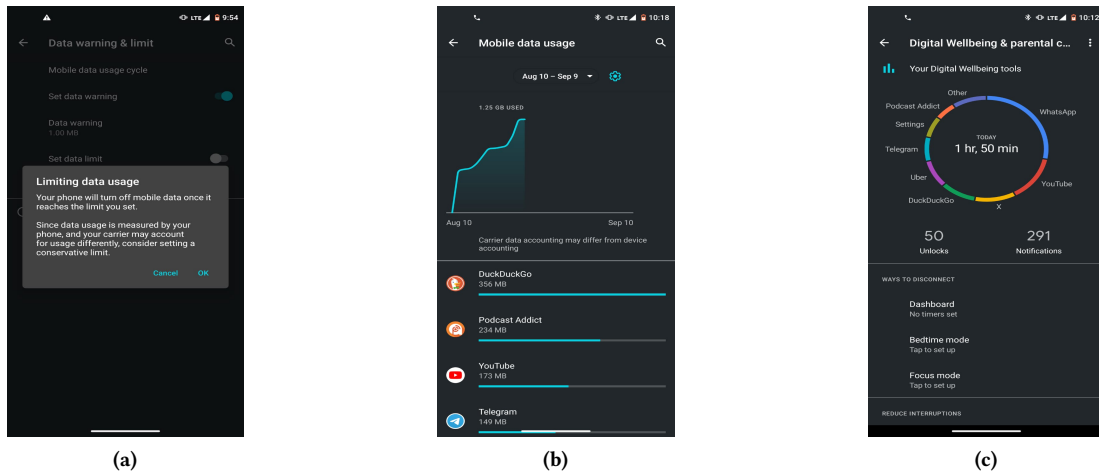


Figure 5: (a) Screenshots to be taken - example Figure 1, (b) Screenshots to be taken - example - Figure 2, (c) Screenshots to be taken - example - Figure 3

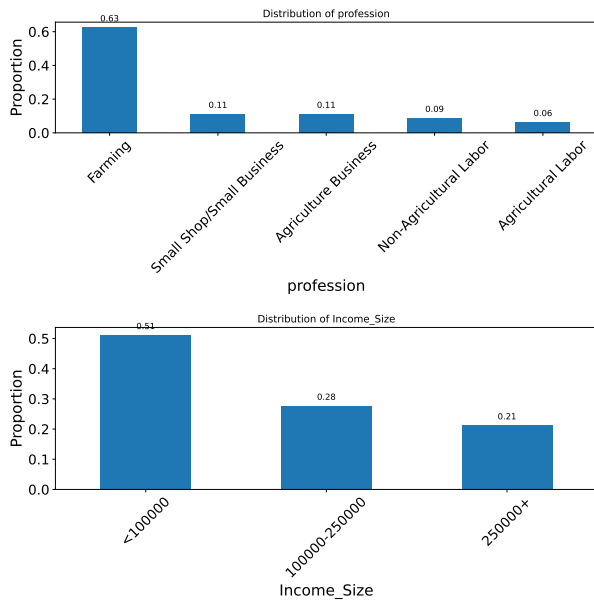


Figure 8: Profession and Income Size Distribution

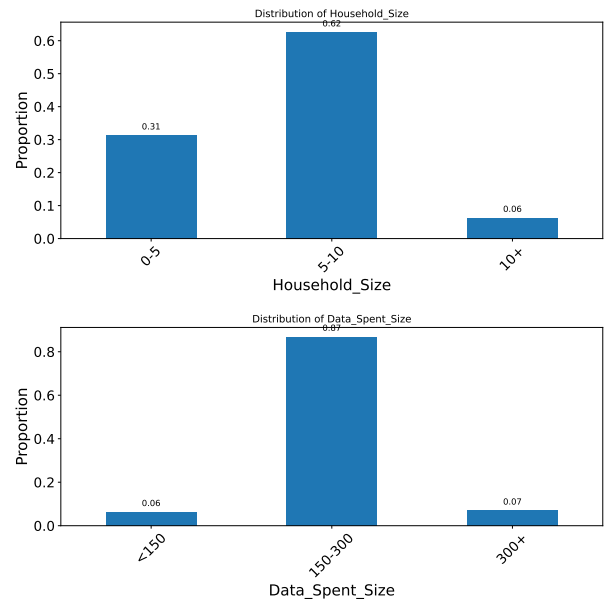


Figure 9: Household Size and Data Spent Size Distribution

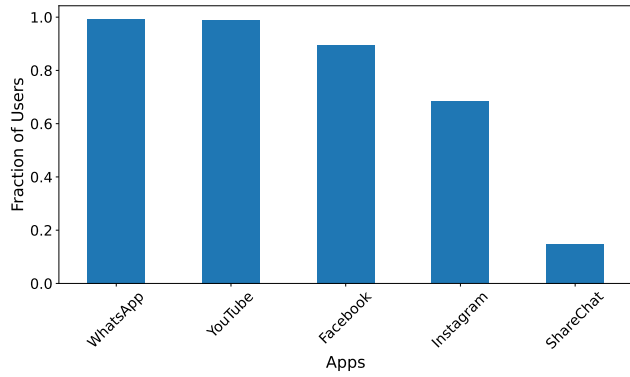


Figure 11: Platforms used.

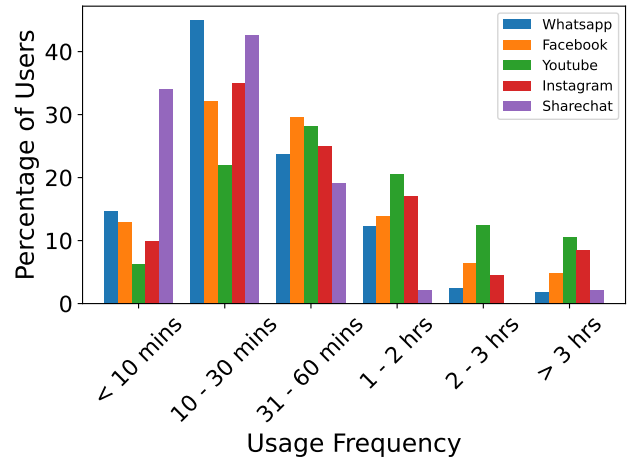


Figure 12: Time spent on various platforms.

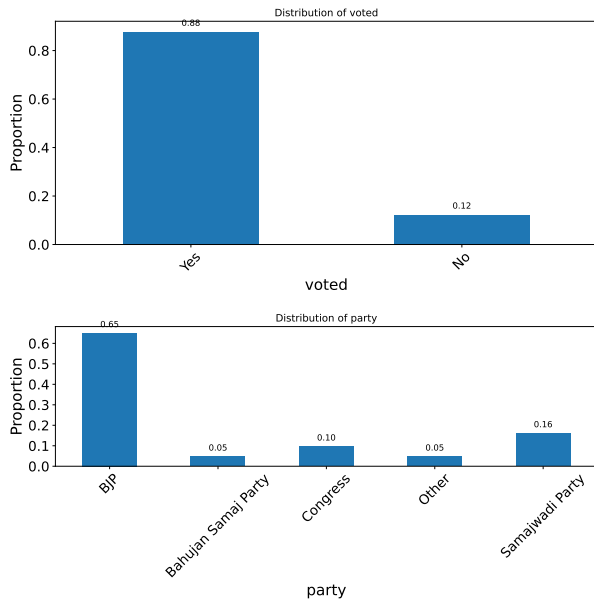


Figure 10: Party and Voted Distribution

7.3 Social media platforms and Data usage

Figure 11 shows the proportion of users who use popular social media platforms. Nearly all the participants reported using WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook. Whereas, ShareChat, the Indian social network, was utilized by approximately 20% of our sample. Figure 12 reports the time spent on each of these platforms and some interesting patterns emerge. A significant portion of our participants dedicated several hours to Facebook and YouTube, in contrast to the relatively limited time spent on the popular messaging application WhatsApp. This trend is also reflected in the data consumption metrics. Figure 14 shows the top 10 apps using most data and Facebook/YouTube.

Figure 13 shows the total data used by the participants in one month. On average, the users use 14.5 GB per month (median 9.3 GB).

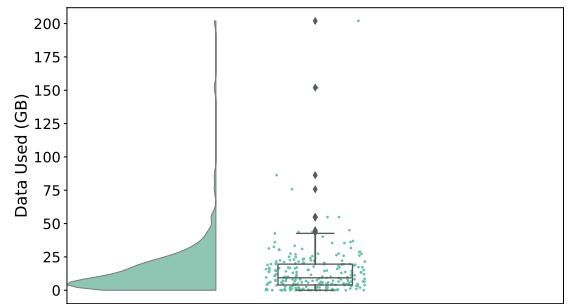


Figure 13: Total data used

The top apps used by users are shown in Figure 14. Social media apps like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram and WhatsApp are among the top 10. Surprisingly, the amount of data used by YouTube, Facebook and Instagram is significantly higher than what WhatsApp uses.

7.4 Compliance

Figure 15 shows the compliance. We see that users significantly reduce the number of notifications received. We also got the screenshots of their data usage pre and post. We computed the difference between the data usage pre and post and if the usage was more than 10MB, we discarded the participant. There were only 3 users who did not comply.

7.5 Internet ban support plots

Support for internet ban. Figure 16 shows the difference in baseline and endline support for internet shutdowns. The transitions are shown in Figure 28. We combined Strongly support and somewhat support into support and similarly for oppose.

The various figures are shown in Appendix (Figures 1, 27, 28).

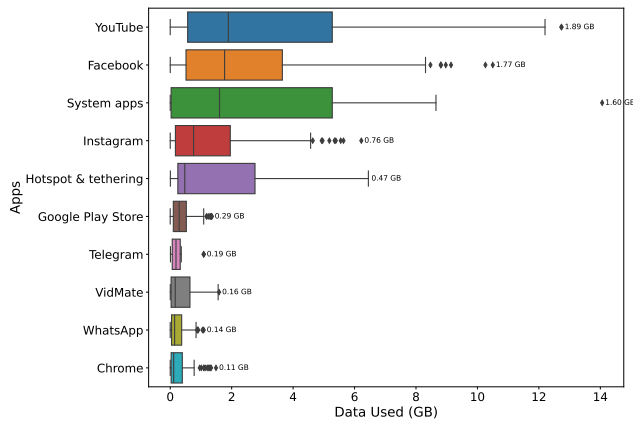


Figure 14: Top 10 apps and data used

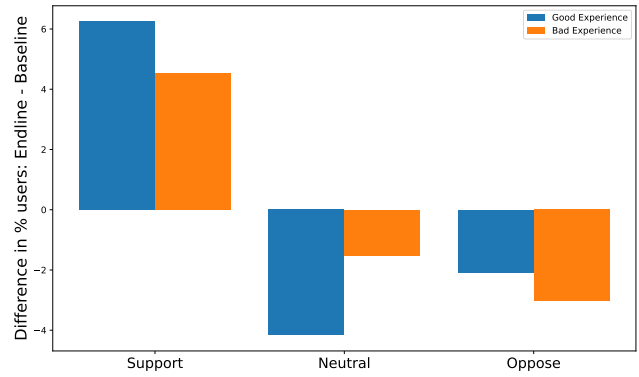


Figure 17: Change in support by their reported experience

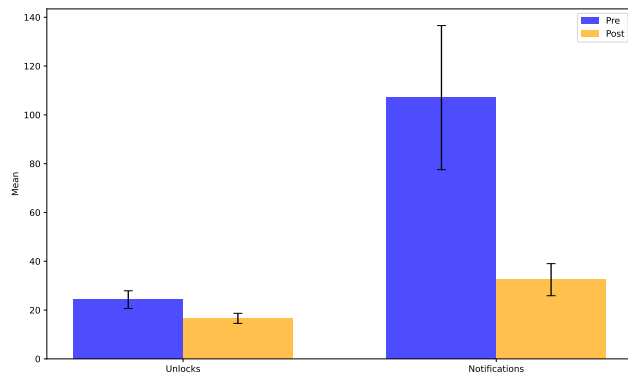


Figure 15: Unlocks and Notifications. We see a clear statistically significant drop in notifications indicating compliance.

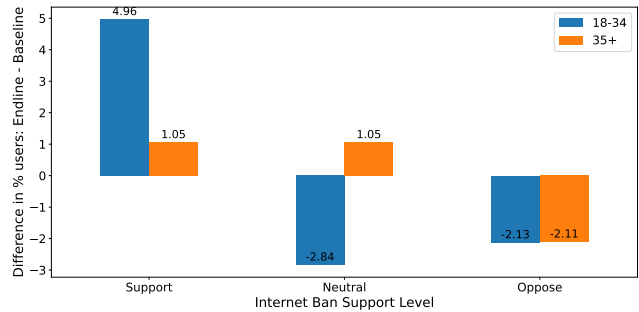


Figure 18: Change in support by their age bucket

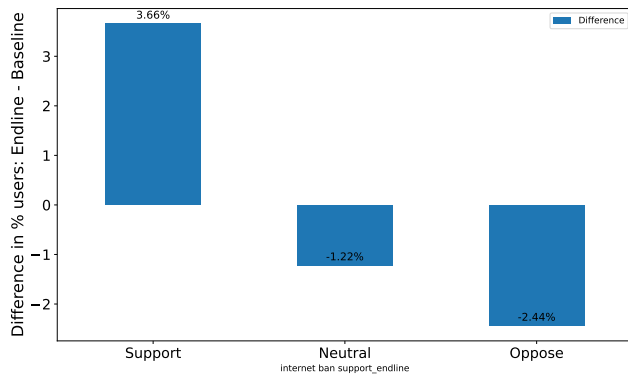


Figure 16: Baseline and endline support

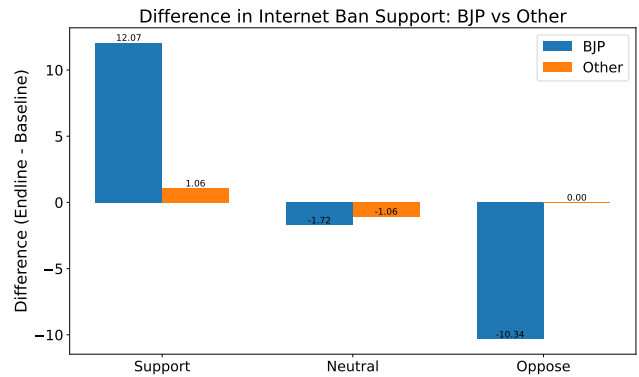


Figure 19: Change in support by party

Next, we looked at how the changes look per category of users. We specifically looked at two categories. First, users who feel good and bad about the internet ban.

Figure 17 shows the differences by experience.

We also tested by age. The age sample skewed younger. So we chose three buckets with roughly a third of our sample each. 18-24, 25-34 and 35+. Figure 18 shows the result.

Figure 19 shows change in support by party they voted for.

Education: Figure 20

Caste: Figure 21

Profession: Figure 22

Income: Figure 23

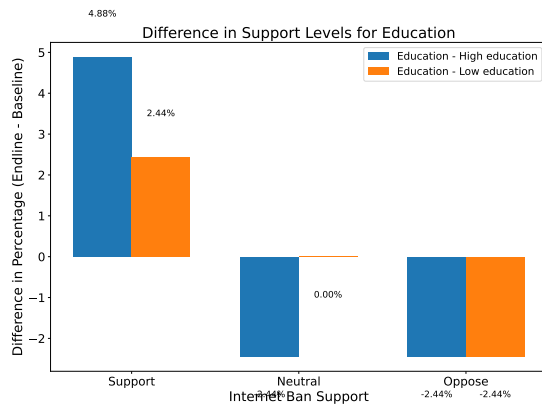


Figure 20: Change in support by education

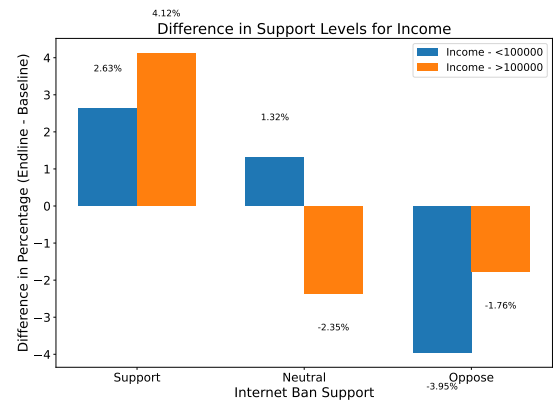


Figure 23: Change in support by income

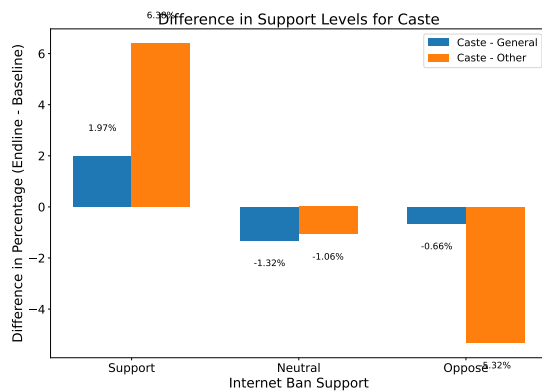


Figure 21: Change in support by caste

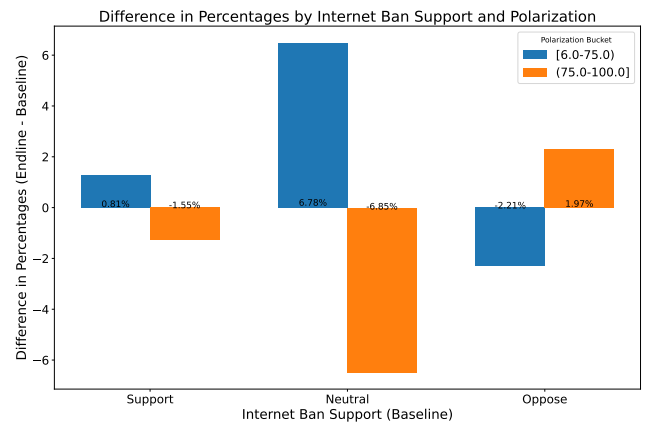


Figure 24: Change in support by political polarization response

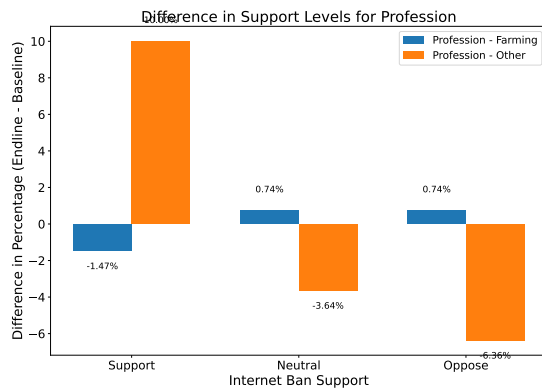


Figure 22: Change in support by profession

Difference in baseline polarization. clear difference. more polarized users reduce their support more. Figure 24

Support for other purposes: We also asked users if they supported internet bans for certain types of cases. like preventing protests, preventing terrorism, preventing cheating in exams, preventing communal riots and , during elections.

Results in Figure 25. All 5 categories in Figure 31

Happiness and Life Satisfaction:

Figure 26 shows the absolute support. We see that overall, there is a lot more support. Figure 27 shows the results for 5 categories. Figure 28 shows the transitions for 5 categories.

Figure 31 shows all 5 categories for the support in other purposes.

Figure 29 shows the change in support by their reported experience.

Figure 30 shows the support per party.

Overall experience distribution: Figure 32 shows the distribution of the experience users had. Overall, around 40% reported having good experience, 27% bad experience and 31% did not report their experiences.

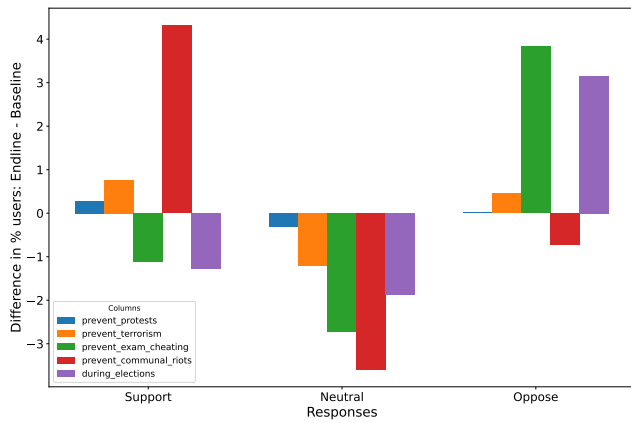


Figure 25: Difference in support for other purposes

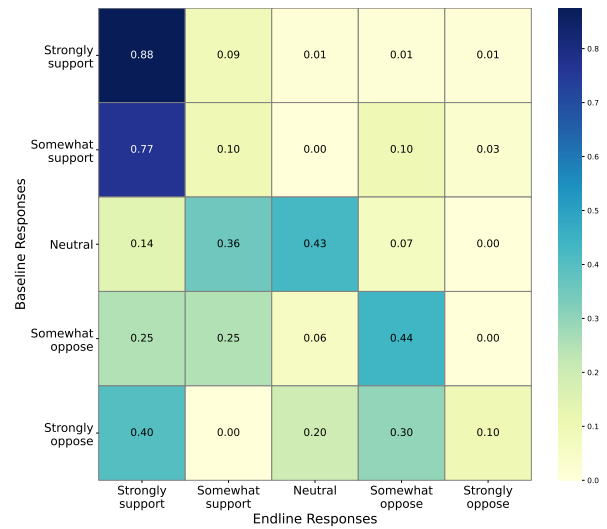


Figure 28: changes in baseline support (all 5 categories)

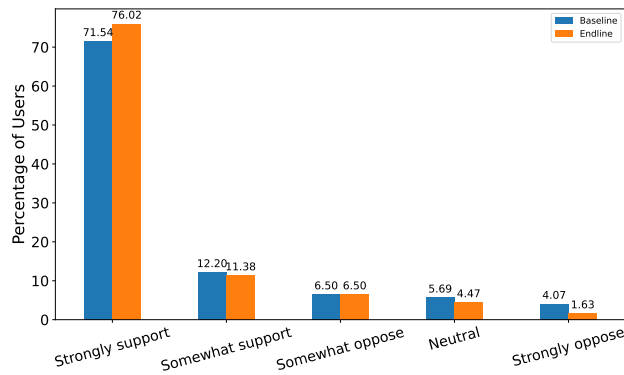


Figure 26: Baseline and endline support (all 5 categories)

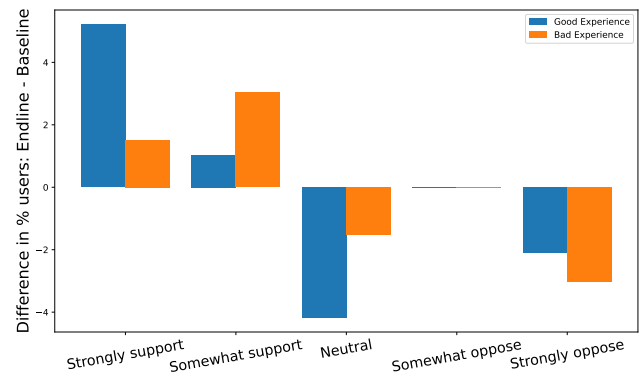


Figure 29: Change in support by their reported experience (all 5 categories)

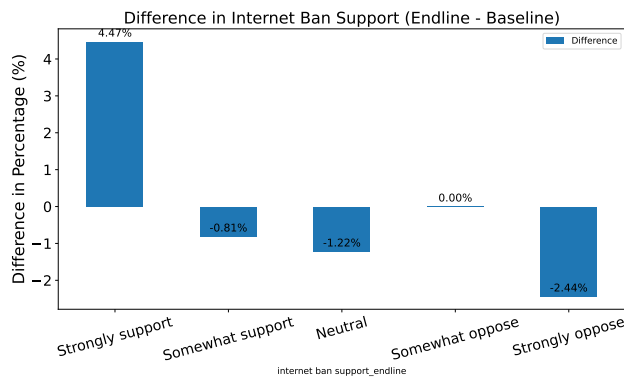


Figure 27: Baseline and endline support (all 5 categories)

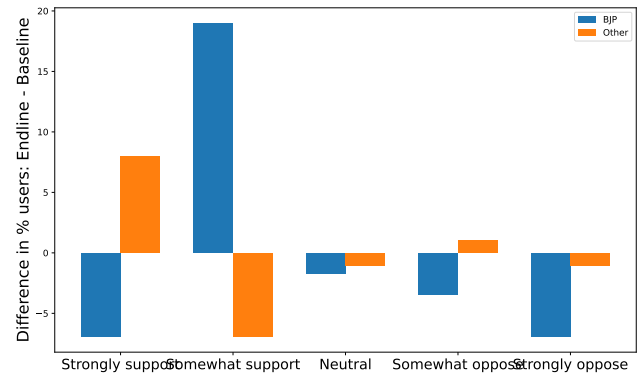


Figure 30: Change in support by party (all 5 categories)

Polarization: ‘On a 100-point scale, rate how favourably or warmly you feel towards people who support other political parties.’ ‘A rating between 50 and 100 means you feel favourably and warmly towards the group.’ Figure 33 shows the change in polarization. We did not find any significant change in polarization ($p = 0.69$). From

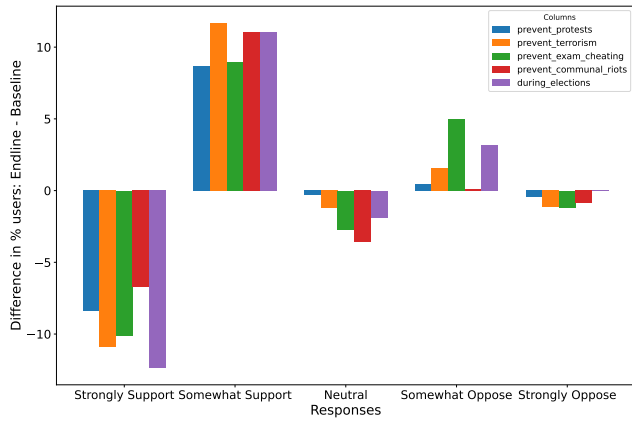


Figure 31: Difference in support for other purposes (all 5 categories)

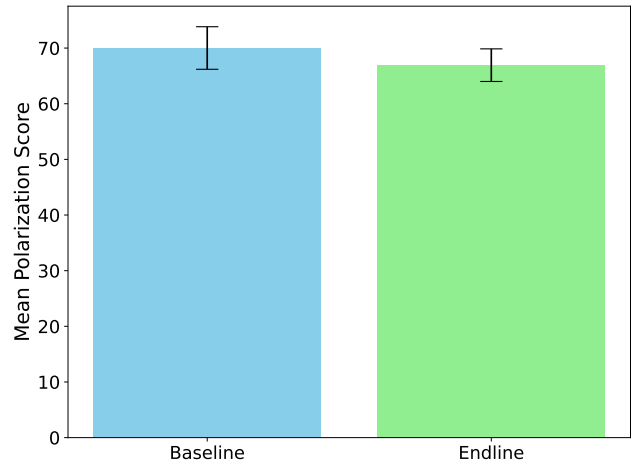


Figure 33: Change in polarization

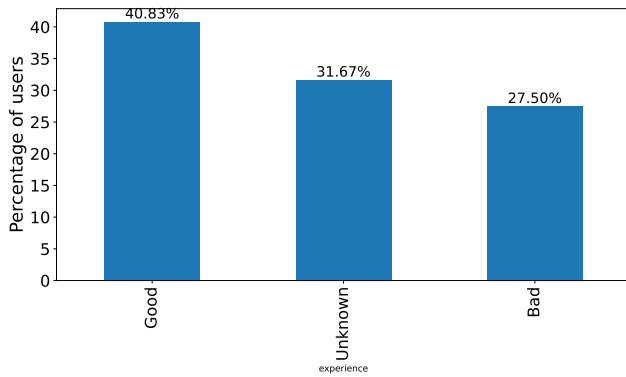


Figure 32: Users overall experience

Figure 33, we can see that even though the average polarization decreased slightly.

7.6 Baseline Survey Questions

Demographics.

- **Phone Number:** _____
- **Name:** _____
- **Age:** _____
- **Gender:**
 - Female (1)
 - Male (2)
 - Other (3)
- **Religion:**
 - Hindu (1)
 - Muslim (2)
 - Christian (3)
 - Sikh (4)
 - Buddhist (5)
 - Jain (6)
 - Tribal (7)
 - Other (8) _____

- No Religion (9)
- **Caste:**
 - General (1)
 - OBC (2)
 - SC (3)
 - ST (4)
- **Number of Household Members:** _____
- **Primary Source of Income:**
 - Farming (12)
 - Agricultural Business (13)
 - Agricultural Labor (14)
 - Non-Agricultural Labor (15)
 - Artisan (16)
 - Small Shop/Business (17)
 - Organized Trade/Large Business (18)
 - Salaried (19)
 - Professional (Lawyer, Doctor, Engineer, etc.) (20)
 - Pension/Rent/Dividends (21)
 - Other (22) _____
- **Family Income in 2023:** _____
- **Level of Education:** _____ (5th grade = 5, Bachelor's = 16)
- **Did you vote in the last election?**
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - Can't remember (3)
- **Which party do you generally vote for?**
 - BJP (1)
 - Congress (2)
 - Samajwadi Party (3)
 - Bahujan Samaj Party (4)
 - Other (5) _____
- **Do you have an internet data plan on your phone?**
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)
- **Monthly spending on data:** _____

- **Number of phones with data plans in your household:**

- **Do you have Wi-Fi/Broadband at home?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

- **Will you need the internet for work in the next two days?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

- **Which of the following apps do you use?**

- WhatsApp (1)
- YouTube (2)
- Facebook (3)
- Instagram (4)
- ShareChat (5)

App Usage.

- **How much time did you spend on WhatsApp per day on average last week?**

- Less than 10 minutes per day (7)
- 10-30 minutes per day (8)
- 31-60 minutes per day (9)
- 1-2 hours per day (10)
- 2-3 hours per day (11)
- More than 3 hours per day (12)

- **How much time did you spend on YouTube per day on average last week?**

- Less than 10 minutes per day (7)
- 10-30 minutes per day (8)
- 31-60 minutes per day (9)
- 1-2 hours per day (10)
- 2-3 hours per day (11)
- More than 3 hours per day (12)

- **How much time did you spend on Facebook per day on average last week?**

- Less than 10 minutes per day (7)
- 10-30 minutes per day (8)
- 31-60 minutes per day (9)
- 1-2 hours per day (10)
- 2-3 hours per day (11)
- More than 3 hours per day (12)

- **How much time did you spend on Instagram per day on average last week?**

- Less than 10 minutes per day (7)
- 10-30 minutes per day (8)
- 31-60 minutes per day (9)
- 1-2 hours per day (10)
- 2-3 hours per day (11)
- More than 3 hours per day (12)

- **How much time did you spend on ShareChat per day on average last week?**

- Less than 10 minutes per day (7)
- 10-30 minutes per day (8)
- 31-60 minutes per day (9)
- 1-2 hours per day (10)
- 2-3 hours per day (11)
- More than 3 hours per day (12)

Support for Internet Ban.

- **To what extent do you support or oppose government-imposed internet shutdowns in a region for law and order?**

- Strongly oppose (6)
- Somewhat oppose (7)
- Neither support nor oppose (8)
- Somewhat support (9)
- Strongly support (10)

Statements on Internet Ban. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding internet access and internet bans:

- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns during protests to prevent clashes.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns to prevent terrorism.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns to prevent cheating during exams.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns to prevent communal riots.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns during elections.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

Wellbeing.

- **How happy do you consider yourself?**

- Very happy (5)
- Fairly happy (6)
- Not particularly happy (7)
- Not happy at all (8)

- **How satisfied are you with your life?**

- Very satisfied (6)

- Somewhat satisfied (7)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (8)
- Slightly dissatisfied (9)
- Very dissatisfied (10)

Polarization.

- **On a scale of 0 to 100, how favorable do you feel towards people who support other political parties?**
 - A rating between 50 and 100 means you feel favorably towards the group.
 - A rating between 0 and 50 means you don't feel favorably towards the group.
 - If you have no strong feelings either way, select 50.

Share WhatsApp Status.

- **Would you like to share this image on your WhatsApp status?**
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)

Screenshot Deactivation Instructions.

- Step 1: Limit the access to data. We instruct participants to limit data usage to 10MB.
- Step 2: We instruct participants to take a screenshot of the app data usage screen.
- Step 3: We instruct participants to enable the app usage page and take screenshots.

7.7 Endline Survey Questions

Demographics.

- **Phone Number:** _____
- **Name:** _____

Support for Internet Ban.

- **To what extent do you support or oppose government-imposed internet shutdowns in a region for law and order?**
 - Strongly oppose (6)
 - Somewhat oppose (7)
 - Neither support nor oppose (8)
 - Somewhat support (9)
 - Strongly support (10)

Statements on Internet Ban. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding internet access and internet bans:

- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns during protests to prevent clashes.
 - Strongly disagree (6)
 - Somewhat disagree (7)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (8)
 - Somewhat agree (9)
 - Strongly agree (10)
- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns to prevent terrorism.
 - Strongly disagree (6)
 - Somewhat disagree (7)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (8)

- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)
- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns to prevent cheating during exams.
 - Strongly disagree (6)
 - Somewhat disagree (7)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (8)
 - Somewhat agree (9)
 - Strongly agree (10)
- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns to prevent communal riots.
 - Strongly disagree (6)
 - Somewhat disagree (7)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (8)
 - Somewhat agree (9)
 - Strongly agree (10)
- The government should be able to impose internet shutdowns during elections.
 - Strongly disagree (6)
 - Somewhat disagree (7)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (8)
 - Somewhat agree (9)
 - Strongly agree (10)

Wellbeing.

- **How happy do you consider yourself?**
 - Very happy (5)
 - Fairly happy (6)
 - Not particularly happy (7)
 - Not happy at all (8)
- **How satisfied are you with your life?**
 - Very satisfied (6)
 - Somewhat satisfied (7)
 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (8)
 - Slightly dissatisfied (9)
 - Very dissatisfied (10)

Polarization.

- **On a scale of 0 to 100, how favorable do you feel towards people who support other political parties?**
 - A rating between 50 and 100 means you feel favorably towards the group.
 - A rating between 0 and 50 means you don't feel favorably towards the group.
 - If you have no strong feelings either way, select 50.

Share WhatsApp Status.

- **Would you like to share this image on your WhatsApp status?**
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)

Screenshot and Enable Internet.

- **Steps for Screenshot and Reactivation:**
 - Step 1: Limit the access to data. We instruct participants to limit data usage to 10MB. This turns off mobile data automatically, but it can be re-enabled if they know how.

- Step 2: Participants are asked to take a screenshot of the app data usage page and scroll down to capture all apps.
- Step 3: Participants are asked to enable the "Digital Well-being" app usage page, take a screenshot of it, and provide access to the app's usage statistics.

Study Experience.

- **Do you know anyone else participating in this study?**
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)

- **If yes, how many people do you know who are participating? _____**
- **Please share your experience of living without the internet for the past 2 days. What did you do instead of using the internet, and how did it make you feel?** (audio recording)
- **Has living without the internet changed your perception of government-imposed internet bans?** (audio recording)