

A whimsical wisdom: exploring consumption of online political comedy and its impact on political engagement of youth in India

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Abstract

While the allure of online political satire stems from its capacity to tickle the audience's funny bones, its functions are conjectured to go beyond mere amusement, including its potential to shape political knowledge, opinion, and activism (Baum, 2002; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Gregorowicz, 2013). Besides, with a dearth of India-specific research, a deeper exploration is vital to understand its role in fostering political engagement within its democratic set-up. Hence, the study intends to measure the relationship between the consumption of online political comedy and the political engagement of the youth of India. The analysis relies on the concepts of media exposure theory and incorporates the correlational research design while adopting a quantitative approach to explore the association between the two. The data was collected from 800 youth (18-35 years) in four first-tier metropolitan cities of India (considering the high internet penetration and accumulation of youth in urban cities) and analysed using SPSS and SMART PLS. The study finds a statistically significant, positive yet weak effect of online political comedy consumption on youth political engagement, highlighting the emergence of the "infotainment paradox."

Keywords: Indian political comedy, consumption pattern, political engagement, infotainment paradox.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The contemporary media environment is going through a massive transformation, influenced by a mix of technological and cultural elements. Scholars have extensively studied the growing commercialization of news outlets, raising legitimate concerns about integrity, commercial

influences, and declining public trust (McChesney, 2004). Simultaneously, progress in media technologies, particularly the development of the internet, has made information sharing more accessible to the public. This transformation has also led to alterations in the ways people use and engage with information (Lindgren, 2021). Unlike traditional media such as television, radio, and print, digital media, characterized by widespread use of computers, mobile phones, and internet connectivity, allows for more participatory and interactive engagement. While old media had long consigned audiences to the role of passive recipients of information, digital media has enabled an active and participatory role, with users engaging with content creators and voicing their opinions. Such an interactive space, as stated by Van Dijck (2012), encourages creativity, participation in culture, and sharing of user-generated content, whether professional or amateur. Additionally, despite falling under some regulatory frameworks, digital media platforms are largely immune to government oversight, allowing freer expression and challenging dominant narratives. As a result, digital media has become an increasingly diverse and dynamic forum for public discourse, where even formerly underrepresented groups can frame political and social discussions. These factors have contributed to the rise of numerous alternative news platforms (Bennett & Livingston, 2008).

One of the most significant developments emerging from this shift is the evolution of online political comedy, which has gradually emerged as a significant and impactful genre. Digital media has transformed comedy conventions, allowing humor to become a powerful vehicle for critically examining political and social realities (Kay, 2018). As per Kay (2018), comedy, as a relatively lighthearted genre, has attained a position of power as an effective tool for deconstructing political events, critiquing institutional behavior, and challenging dominant ideological narratives. In particular, the political comedy genre thrives in cyberspaces where freedom of speech is increasingly present, representing a dramatic shift from the traditionally regulated spaces of mainstream media.

1.2. Rationale of the study

Indian digital political comedy has grown to include a variety of formats that engage political issues in a popular and accessible manner. Satirical YouTube channels like *The Desh Bhakt*, *EIC Outrage*, and *On Air with AIB* use humor and critique to present themselves as alternative political discussion spaces. At the same time, meme culture, with its visual concision and virality, has become an unofficial but powerful form of political communication (Shifman, 2014). Musical satire, such as *Aisi Taisi Democracy*, uses popular cultural forms to discuss socio-political issues in engaging and memorable manners (Kumar, 2015).

The dissemination of digital media across India has completely altered political content production and consumption. India has around 60% of its population below the age of 30, with steadily increasing internet penetration (Internet and Mobile Association of India, 2022). Indians aged below 30 are a highly strategic segment in constant touch with digital content. Political comedy, in general, has been a powerful means of expression in this context, turning conventional gatekeeping mechanisms in mainstream media on their head (Saxena & Ofori-Parku, 2024). Besides, with India's politically tense atmosphere, media censorship, and increasing youth activism (Sahu & Gupta, 2024), it is crucial to examine the effect of these emerging forms of comedy on political engagement. Internet political comedy can deconstruct complex matters, promote critical thinking, and challenge popular narratives; however, its specific effect on the political actions of Indians youth needs to be explored. This research seeks to identify the quantity of political consumption of comedy among youth and determine whether they lead to increased political participation or remains a passive diversion.

1.3. Operational definitions of political comedy and political engagement

The evolving function of political comedy on new media necessitates a specific conceptual and operational definition to quantify its impact on political participation. Political comedy is normally defined as humor that comments on political issues, satirizes political institutions or leaders, or engages in socio-political issues through satire, parody, irony, or exaggeration (Becker, 2024). It differs from traditional journalism as it blends entertainment and criticism, thus making political discourse more entertaining while provoking public debate (Febriandy & Habibah, 2024). Researchers differ on its impact, with some perceiving it to depoliticize politics (Petersen-Wagner & Ludvigsen, 2024), while others highlight its role in political literacy, mobilization, and counter-narrative provision to mainstream media (Kristiyono et al., 2024). In the age of digital media, political comedy is disseminated in diverse forms, such as stand-up comedy, satirical news programs, memes, and musical satire (Pandutama & Habsari, 2024). Because of the nature of digital participation being fragmented, this study uses a broad operational definition that covers any digital comedic content commenting on political issues on digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Hence, in current study, political comedy refers to any form of humorous content (texts/audios/videos) dealing with political issues/events/schemes/program/policies/political parties/politicians/ political institutions on online platforms like websites, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, etc. It takes under its purview all the prevalent online formats of political comedy like political memes, stand-up comic, news parody, satirical news commentary, political poetry and music, etc. The wide coverage offers a foundation for future studies on the examination of particular comedic subgenres and their specific impacts.

Political engagement is an individual's cognitive, expressive, and participatory involvement in political discourse (Gabriel, 2012). Scholars describe political engagement as cognitive engagement (awareness and knowledge), expressive engagement (opinion formation and political debate), and participatory engagement (activism and advocacy). Digital media has opened political engagement beyond traditional-style activism, and new means of participation, such as viral humor, meme culture, and satirical commentary, have become available (Febriandy & Habibah, 2024). Political engagement, therefore, in this research is defined as a five-faceted construct with five interconnected facets: political awareness, opinion formation, expression, mobilization, and decision-making. Covering the entire gamut of digital civic participation, the definition provides an in-depth investigation of whether political comedy inspires active engagement or remains a passive form of entertainment.

1.4. Prior studies on political comedy and its influence on political engagement: the Indian context and research gap

The impact of political comedy on citizens' civic engagement is a critical research area in Western democracies, where scholars have studied its impact on the development of political consciousness, opinion, and political mobilization of citizens (Saxena & Ofori-Parku, 2024). Empirical studies reveal that political comedy is an alternative source of news and political criticism, making difficult political issues more accessible to different audiences (Mazumdar, 2024). Political comedy has transitioned from traditional television and print media to digital media like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter since the emergence of digital media, offering new means of interacting with audiences (Singh, 2024). However, despite the presence of studies in Western societies that have established a link between the consumption of satire and increased political engagement (Baur, 2024), there is a significant absence of user-focused studies in India that investigate the consumption habits of online political satire and its real-world implications for civic engagement (Shivaprasad, 2024).

Previous work in India has predominantly analysed political humour through content analysis or media representation research, exploring how political comedy forms like satire evaluates governance, media coverage, and public policy (Orlov, 2024). Although studies have analysed the historical significance of Indian political satire from newspaper cartoons to TV sketches (Kulkarni, 2017), Indian viewers' online viewing habits are not yet well researched. Recent studies note the increasing role of stand-up comedians, satirical news sites, and meme culture in shaping public discourse (Chakravarti, 2024). Yet, these studies infrequently quantify the degree to which Indian viewers watch online political comedy or measure its effect on their political attitudes, expressions, and behaviours (Rani & Yadav, 2023). In addition, although international studies have linked consumption of political comedy to some political actions such as voting intention and activism (Baum, 2002), Indian research has typically not had sufficient empirical evidence to link consumption of political comedy to political engagement. Most studies are limited in scope, focusing on individual satirical programs or small user samples, and are not representative of broader consumption patterns (Badola, 2018). This is especially relevant given that India has a unique media environment, with online political comedy vying with mainstream news and state media (Fahad & Mustafa, 2024). Without large-scale, user-centred studies on how Indian youth consumed online political comedy, we cannot know its influence on democratic engagement.

This study uses Media Exposure Theory as a conceptual framework to explain the interaction between exposure of individuals to political comedy on the internet and resulting levels of political engagement. Based on early research in communication studies (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Gerbner & Gross, 1976), the theoretical framework argues that intensity, duration, and intentionality of media exposure have a profound effect on subsequent psychological and behavioural outcomes. Translated to the context of political comedy, the theory predicts that increased and extended exposure to the media form could be linked to increased political awareness, the construction and articulation of political views, and possibly increased civic engagement. To test this theoretical position, the study examines the differential effect of different modalities of consumption of political comedy, from passive reception to active participation.

1.5. Aim and objectives of the study

Against the background of such gaps, this study aims to critically investigate Indian youth's consumption of online political comedy and its correlation with political awareness, opinion, expression, activism, and voting decisions.

The objectives of the study are to:

- To examine the consumption patterns of online political comedy among urban Indian youth, and
- To investigate the relationship between the consumption of online political satire and the level of political engagement among urban Indian youth.

The study intends to answer the following research questions:

- What are the consumption patterns of online political comedy among urban Indian youth?
- How frequently do urban Indian youth interact with online political satire content (e.g., through likes, shares, comments)?

- Is there a statistically significant relationship between the consumption of online political satire and the political engagement of urban Indian youth?
- If such a relationship exists, what is its strength and direction?

2. Literature review

2.1. Debates regarding the terminologies of political satire, news parody and political comedy

Academics have been at odds for a long time on the most appropriate term used in reference to satirical content addressing political issues. While political satire, political comedy, and news parody are some of the most common terms used in media contexts, academics are now increasingly recognizing the necessity of definitional accuracy in reference to humor content addressing politics.

The phrase political satire refers to the criticism of political institutions and ruling leaders, generally using irony or sarcasm as its method of attack (Holm, 2023). Moreover, political satire is also an educational tool and may stimulate critical reflection on political issues (Gray et al., 2009). It works on how effectively audiences are able to perceive veiled meaning, and because of this reason, it is incredibly cognition-exigent (Day, 2011).

News parody, on the other hand, is an imitation of regular news formats, employing humour for political leader's and news media's satire (Baym, 2005; Jones, 2010). Shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* feature actual facts complemented by humor to challenge mainstream media's credibility. Similar to satire, news parody employs traditional news conventions for presenting political commentary (Baym, 2005).

While the distinctions acknowledge various forms of political humour, political comedy is more general and broad term that can include satire, parody, and other humour-based political content. Political comedy, as defined by Warner (2007), is an "umbrella term" for various humorous forms and styles, ranging from scripted satire to improv social media memes from news parody to stand-ups. Theoretical flexibility in the term political comedy makes it a convenient term for characterizing the vast array of humorous political expression that pervades online communities.

2.2. Media Exposure Theory, effects of political comedy and proposal of infotainment paradox

The Media Exposure Theory is a foundational construct in the study of media and communication, suggesting that frequency, duration, and intensity with which one is exposed to media have significant implications for the effects that such media can exert upon attitudes, cognition, and behaviours. Though not always viewed as a unified theory, media exposure is a constituent element in many influential theoretical frameworks. For example, Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) points out how ongoing exposure to certain news frames can shape the public's perception of the salience of issues, while Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) explores how extensive viewing of television programs over time can incrementally fashion one's world view. Similarly, the Cognitive Mediation Model (Eveland, 2001) illustrates how repeated exposure instigates attention and elaborative processes that heighten political learning. The fundamental proposition however remains "Exposure Influences Outcome". One of the implicit working assumptions of these exposure-based theories is the effect of accumulation in the media, i.e., more and more repeated exposure to specific media content will make it exert stronger cognitive, affective, and behavioural impacts. This is especially relevant in the case of political comedy, a genre that mixes entertainment with

political discussion and often serves as a secondary avenue of political information consumption. Political satire shows create political engagement and consciousness among the youth via information integration and humour (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Becker, 2011). Via comedic framing, they make messages more memorable and effective (Young, 2004) and hence establish media exposure as an active agent in shaping political attitudes.

To contextualize this further, the research proposes the Infotainment Paradox of Political Comedy, an extension of Postman's (2006) theorization regarding the incursion of entertainment into the public sphere. Political comedy, having the capacity to engage people better because of its popularity and humour, can also have the potential to risk making political issues trivial. This paradox is especially pertinent in the Indian digital media environment, where viral content tends to prioritize entertainment over substance. By incorporating this paradox into the Media Exposure Theory, the study presents a nuanced explanation of how online political comedy can mobilize and constrain political participation among urban youth.

2.3. Relationship between political comedy and political engagement

According to Khasnabis et.al (2010), political engagement is “broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives.” The relationship between the consumption of online political comedy and its impact on political engagement has been the prevalent subject of inquiry, reflecting the lack of agreement among scholars. While some describe it as a source of pure entertainment that cannot have any meaningful impact on political participation (Prior, 2003), and others argue that it is more informative (Baum, 2002) and persuasive enough to bring about political change by guaranteeing greater political engagement/participation of its regular audience (Lee, 2014), scholars seem to be divided over its conflicting functions over time.

Research on the relationship between online political satire consumption and political engagement tends to focus on its different aspects including political awareness/knowledge; political opinion, political expression, political activism, and political decision.

The scholarly debate on the relationship between political comedy consumption and political awareness is contentious. Some studies suggest a positive correlation, with the premise that exposure to political comedy can enhance political knowledge, particularly among those with low political interest (Baum, 2002, 2003). Satirical content has been proven to be an avenue of political education, which provokes audiences to seek additional information (Xenos & Becker, 2009; Gregorowicz, 2013). Additionally, empirical studies indicate that political comedy consumption is associated with enhanced political knowledge among young Latinx adults (Martínez & Atouba, 2021), among Canadian millennials (Petkov, 2022). On the other hand, there exists a counterargument that political satire does not enhance political awareness and, in fact, may deter it. Prior (2003) discredited the arguments presented by Baum, asserting that audiences watch political satire for entertainment purposes rather than for information. His survey revealed that the audiences of political comedy have a greater interest in humour than in political information. Other scholars argue that satire may reinforce existing biases rather than encourage critical thinking (Murti et al., 2024). Likewise, some studies propose that political humour may trivialize complex political matters, reducing politics to a question of entertainment rather than viewing it as a field that requires serious analysis (Yeganeh Dizajwar & Karimi Tarki, 2025).

Beyond political knowledge, political satire can also influence political opinions. Kucera (2015) found that exposure to satirical content can shape perceptions of political candidates. Boukes (2019) demonstrates the indirect influence of political satire on the public agenda. His study reveals that by prioritizing certain political issues over others, satire can shape the topics

discussed by citizens, media, and Parliament. Conversely, Young (2004) presented findings indicating that humour of this kind did not significantly alter the opinions of the public regarding the political candidates in the 2000 United States general elections. Similarly, in their research, Ferré-Pavia et al. (2016) discovered that citizens mostly do not perceive that the programme affects their political opinions. The majority identified themselves as well-informed, with 76.2% self-describing as frequent news consumers. This self-assessment might lead them to feel that they are less susceptible to the power of satire. However, the lack of consensus on the relationship between the two demands further probe.

Johann (2024) shows that the value of online political comedy (particularly memes) are not limited to entertainment but also as a channel of political discussion. The results of his online survey (n=482) showed that political memes have a significant implication in the political participation of the users through their political expression. Paul (2017) examines the role of English-language stand-up comedy as a contemporary Indian public forum. Paul (2017) argues that this forum allows individuals to express opinions on social, political, and cultural issues at local, national, and international levels. Halversen and Weeks (2023) utilize a two-wave YouGov survey of 1,800 American adults who participated in the 2020 U.S. presidential election to examine the creation and sharing of political memes on Facebook and the impact of political meme exposure on political engagement and emotional reactions. The research shows that exposure to political memes may increase the expression of opinion and impact people's political attitudes and behaviours. However, a counterview is also presented in studies like Penney (2020), who revealed that young adults might also perceive drawbacks to sharing political memes, hence avoiding them due to concerns about trivialization and polarization. Hence, there lies a discrepancy in the effects of online political comedy on the political expression of the users.

According to Lee (2014), watching political satire might encourage people to participate in politics by going to protests or casting a ballot, hence contributing to political activism and political decisions. Mukonyoro (2023) in his investigation revealed the significant effects of the satirical show on elite youth voting decision-making in Nairobi through increased political awareness and critical thinking. However, Rani and Yadav (2023) point out that although political jokes may be mobilizing, there have been instances where they create political cynicism, which discourages one from activism. Sarver (2007) discusses the concern that social networking sites create niches, restricting the ability of political comedy to induce mass political action. It points out that the 'irrationality' of the postmodern condition can undermine the connection between political comedy consumption and political activity. Also, Kulkarni (2017), however, discovered scant proof of a direct impact on political beliefs and voting behaviour. Further empirical studies are required in the context of India to get clarity on the relationship between the consumption of political comedy and political activism, as well as political decision.

The debates and discussions pertaining to online political comedy in the context of India seem to have their limitations. Firstly, most of the Indian studies and commentaries are either based on secondary sources (evidence gap) or analyses of a few YouTube Videos or Memes of social media (sample size limitations). This also extends to other limited empirical studies focusing on the consumption and effects of online political satire in the context of India, which seems not to have taken into consideration the ample number of respondents as a sample to generalize the findings. While globally there exists a plethora of studies focusing on measuring the statistical relationship between the consumption of online political comedy and its impact on the political engagement of the audience, there is a paucity of the same in an Indian context (Population Gap and Conceptual Gap). To address these research gaps, the current study investigates the unexplored aspects of the consumption and effects of online political comedy in the Indian context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical underpinning and research design

Grounding its study on the conceptual framework developed in Media Exposure Theory, this work is based on the underlying assumption that the magnitude, frequency, and intention of media use correlate with the influence media exert over audience members' attitudes, thinking processes, and behavioural tendencies (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Eveland, 2001; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). In this current study, such theoretical framework is translated into empirical measurement by examining "online political comedy consumption modalities," determined on four overall dimensions: use frequency, use purposefulness, exposure duration, and interaction with the content. These criteria comply with the underlying principles of Media Exposure Theory, which stress that higher frequency and more active involvement enhance the media influence potential.

This theoretical background forms the basis for the examination of how exposure to media might impact political participation, a complex construct measured via eleven different indicators across five dimensions: political awareness, expressive actions, activist activity, formation of political opinions, and political decision-making processes. Their inclusion is justified by current scholarly literature suggesting that political content presented in satirical and humorous modes, owing to its potentially repetitive and entertaining character, has the potential to boost the acquisition of political knowledge, facilitate the change of outlooks, and serve as an inducement to participatory behaviour (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Becker, 2011; Young, 2004). Methodologically, Media Exposure Theory thus forms the basis for the theoretical model predicting a positive correlation between increased and intentional consumption of online political humour and increased political participation in cognitive, expressive, and behavioural dimensions.

3.2. Path model, constructs and indicators

Based on these hypotheses developed as per the literature review, a path model demonstrating the assumed effects of the consumption of political satire on the political engagement of the youth was developed using Smart PLS. The model also specifies the indicators of the two constructs, i.e., i) Consumption of Online Political Satire among Youth (CH), and ii) Political Engagement of Youth (PE).

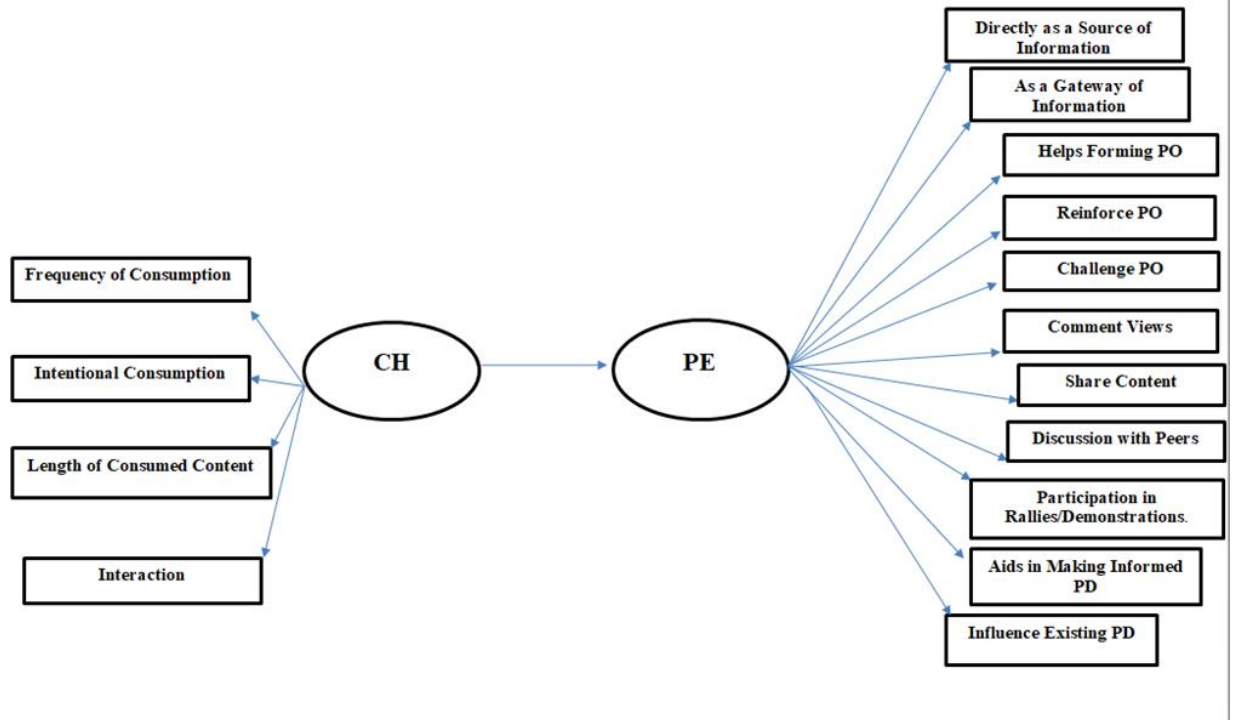


Figure 1: Path model on the relationship of consumption habit of online political comedy and political engagement of youth, *PO-Political Opinion, PD-Political Decision

Based on the theoretical underpinnings, the construct of consumption habit is operationalized through four measurable indicators:

- Frequency of Consumption (CH1): Respondent’s self-reported frequency of consuming online political comedy.
- Intentional Consumption (CH2): Respondent’s frequency of deliberately seeking out such content.
- Length of Content Watched (CH3): The duration of videos respondents typically watch in one sitting.
- Interaction with Content (CH4): Respondent’s frequency of engaging with content through likes, comments, or shares.

The construct of political engagement (PE) was measured using eleven indicators (reflected in a form of statements in the questionnaire). These constructs are derived from the five predominant and recurrent dimensions of political engagement, which, according to existing scholarly research, appear to be influenced by exposure to political comedy.

- Political Awareness (PA): PA1 (using online comedy for news), PA2 (use as a gateway to seek further information)
- Political Expression (PEX): PEX1 (commenting on political issues), PEX2 (sharing content), PEX3 (discussing with peers)
- Political Activism (PAC): PAC1 (participating in rallies or protests)
- Political Opinion (PO): PO1 (forming opinions), PO2 (reinforcing opinions), PO3 (challenging opinions)
- Political Decision (PD): PD1 (making informed decisions), PD2 (influencing decisions).

These indicators were expressed in form of eleven statements that were measured using 5-point scales and analysis of data was done using SPSS and Smart PLS.

3.3. Research method, participant recruitment & data collection

Considering that the research objectives were predominantly audience-centric, the study has taken a quantitative approach and the method of survey was utilized to collect data. As per prior research, online political satire is still mostly an urban phenomenon, (Healy & Jones, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2019; Doona, 2016; Reilly, 2010). Additionally, studies have shown that those with higher incomes and educational attainment, who are frequently found in urban areas, are more likely to engage with online political news and comedy (Pew Research Center, 2019). Hence, the data was collected from four first-tier metropolitan cities of India: New Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Pune. Besides, a total of 800 respondents belonging to the age group of 18-35 years (200 responses from each city) were consulted to fill out the questionnaire. According to the definition of the National Youth Policy of India, and the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Government of India, the youth are in the age group of 15-35 years (Planning Commission, 2008; Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2023). But since the study was political in nature, the results would have been more befitting to be associated with the functioning of democracy, if we carried out the study among individuals at least eligible to vote and whose political perception or opinion directly influenced the government of the nation. Due care had also been taken of the point that the age group was also befitting as 54 percent of users of the internet in India are in the age group of 20-39 years (Statista, 2020). So, keeping the above care in view, the age group chosen for the study is 18-35 years. These cities were preferred as they have better infrastructure, such as employment prospects and educational institutions, which draw a sizable youth population. Furthermore, the age group considered for the study is consistent with other studies that found younger groups to be most affected by online political satire (Healy & Jones, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2019; Doona, 2016; Reilly, 2010). Respondents were recruited from various locations in the selected cities, including educational institutions, workplaces, youth organizations, and public spaces. Those who volunteered completed a questionnaire assessing their consumption behavior of political satire on social media and its impact on their political engagement. Out of the 800 respondents, 131 admitted to “never” accessing the content of political satire online, and hence only 669 responses were considered fit for further analysis.

As part of an ongoing Ph.D. research project, a structured, closed-ended questionnaire was used to conduct a survey. The questionnaire began with details about the researchers and the study’s objective. To ensure clarity, it also provided a definition of political comedy in the context of this research, describing it as a broad term encompassing any form of online humorous content (whether text, audio, or video) that addresses political matters such as events, policies, political parties, politicians, or institutions on digital platforms like websites, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Additionally, popular formats of political comedy, including political memes, stand-up performances, news parodies, and satirical news commentaries, were outlined to help respondents better understand the concept.

The original questionnaire contained a total of 52 items. However, this paper presents only a portion of the survey, with a deliberate focus on the relationship between political comedy consumption and youth political engagement. Consequently, only items regarding the consumption pattern and political engagement were incorporated into the model and consequently, into this paper. Further details on the questionnaire items are provided in Appendix I, while the response means are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Also, the questionnaire was verified by three experts in the subject matter to ensure its validity, warranting that the questions asked are coherent with the aim of the study. The

reliability of the instrument was tested after conducting a pilot testing of 100 respondents and it was found to be suitable to go further with the survey as the Cronbach's Alpha was more than 0.7 (Table 3).

4. Data analysis and findings

The primary data were collected from the respondents possessing the following demographic characteristics.

The sample of 800 respondents was predominantly male (57.75%), with females constituting 41.87% and a small percentage (0.375%) identifying as other genders. This gender distribution was consistent across all four cities, with males slightly outnumbering females in each location (cf. Table 1 in the Appendix).

All respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35. The largest age group was 18-23, followed by 24-29 and 30-35, comprising 42.625%, 30.125%, and 27.25% of the sample, respectively (cf. Table 2 in the Appendix).

4.1. Construct reliability and validity

The data was subjected to factor analysis with an initial investigation of data validity and reliability. For reliability, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were calculated. Since the values remained higher than 0.7, each construct was found to demonstrate higher levels of internal consistency reliability. Besides, the average variance extracted was also measured to check convergent validity, whose values confirmed convergent validity since they were more than the acceptable threshold of 0.5.

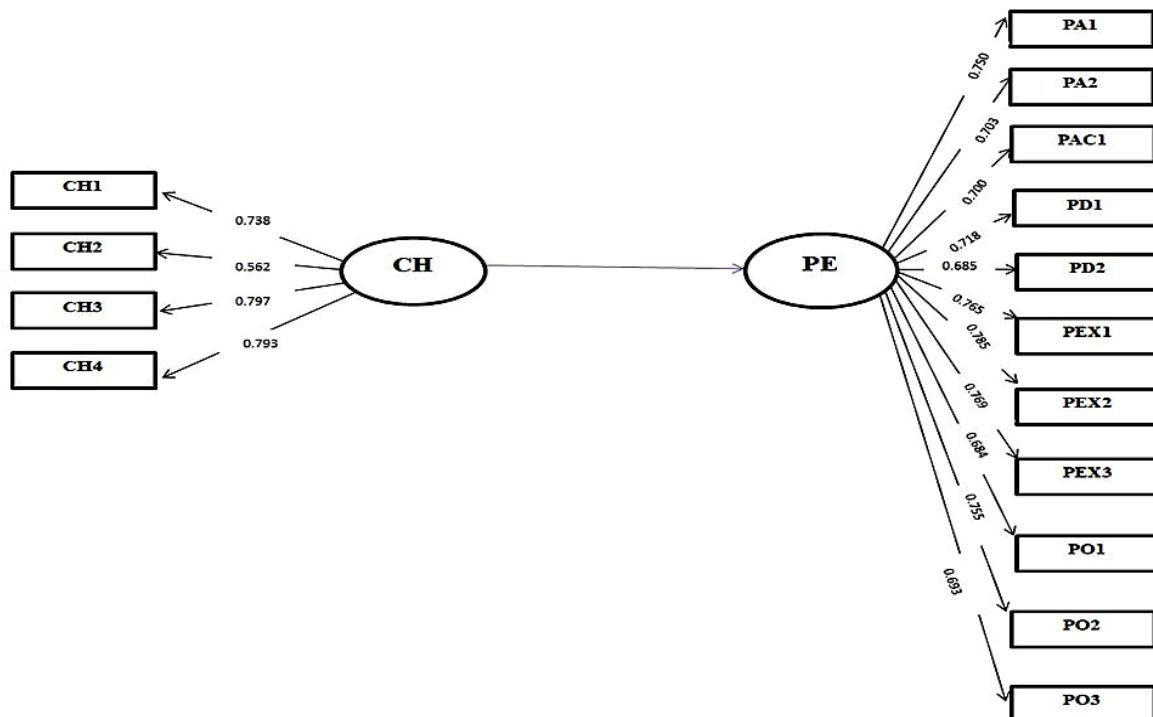


Figure 2. Outer loadings

The measurement of outer loadings (Figure 2) and respective t statistics and p-values (Table 4 in the Appendix) also signifies that the indicators used to measure the constructs are both valid and significant.

4.2. Consumption of online political comedy among urban Indian youth

The analysis of data collected from the four cities reveals the following findings regarding the consumption habits of online political comedy among youth:

4.2.1. Frequency of consumption

Respondents were queried about the frequency of their social media consumption of political comedy using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always). The results indicated a moderately frequent consumption pattern among young adults, with individual city means ranging between 3 and 4. New Delhi demonstrated the highest frequency (mean = 3.24), followed by Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Pune. Notably, 131 respondents denied exposure to political comedy on social media and hence selected "Never" as their consumption frequency. The overall mean of 3.15 further confirms a moderate tendency towards higher-frequency consumption.

The ANOVA analysis found no significant differences in responses to "Frequency of Consumption" across the four cities studied. This indicates that geographical location does not significantly influence these factors.

4.2.2. Mode of access (intentional/unintentional)

To understand the quality of consumption, the 669 respondents who had accessed online political comedy at some point (excluding the 131 who selected "never" for frequency of consumption) were asked how they consume such content.

While the means of individual cities for deliberate searches ranged between 2 and 3, indicating a moderately low frequency, Bengaluru showed the highest tendency and New Delhi the lowest. However, ANOVA analysis revealed no significant differences across cities (p -value > 0.05), suggesting that geographical location does not substantially impact the mode of access to online political comedy among young people.

4.2.3. Length of content on online political comedy watched in one go

Frequency of consumption is a metric of how consistently participants watch political comedy content, and the degree of involvement was examined by asking participants the length of contents participants usually watch in one session. To assess this, a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Less than a quarter to 5 = Entire video was used.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) also established statistically significant regional variation in viewing habits ($p < 0.05$), i.e., geographic region affects this viewing habits. Participants who were from New Delhi, Bengaluru, and Pune tended to have a greater inclination to lose interest in watching before half a video. Participants from Kolkata, however, tended to have a comparatively greater inclination to watch half or more of the content offered.

In total, 68.31% of participants had watched half or less of a political comedy video, with 47.68% having watched a quarter or less. A mere 31.68% watched beyond the halfway point. The trends indicate a generally low rate of extended watching of political comedy by youth, i.e., even when such content is watched, it is hardly watched to completion.

In order to further explore the level of attention paid to the content of political comedy, the respondents were then asked about the length of content they usually finish watching in one sitting, particularly for lengthy videos that exceed 10 minutes.

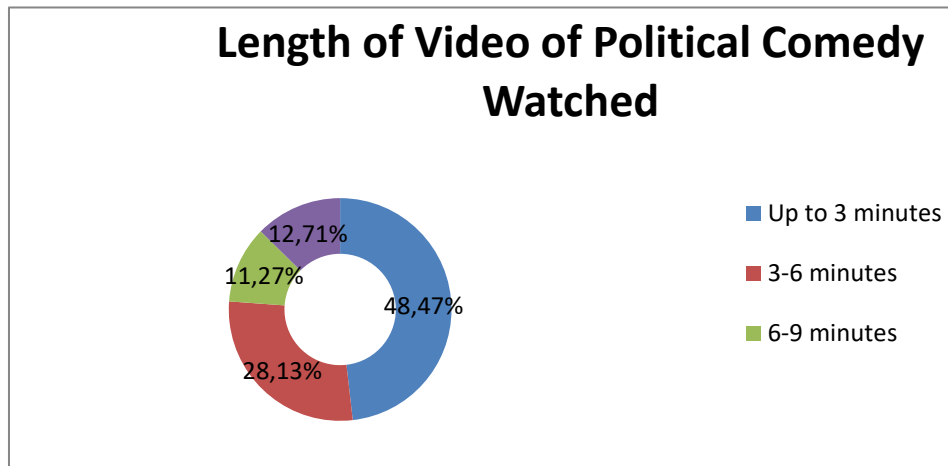


Figure 3. Length of video watch in one go

As apparent from Figure 3, almost half of the respondents watch less than three minutes of the video, and only 12.71% of the respondents end up watching more than 9 minutes of the videos, in the case of the long videos. On the scale of 1 (Up to 3 minutes) to 4 (More than nine minutes), the Mean scores of the feedback proved that the youth population was mostly willing to watch less than six (6) minutes of video content in one sitting. The youth from Kolkata watched political comedy videos on social media for 3-9 minutes in one sitting, with a Mean of 2.10 between '2' (3-6 minutes) and '3' (6-9 minutes). Further, the result of the ANOVA test also confirmed that the variation in the responses among the cities was statistically significant, as the p-value was less than 0.05.

4.2.4. Interact (like/comment/share) with the content of online political comedy on social media

Regarding interactions (liking, commenting, sharing), respondents in New Delhi, Bengaluru, and Pune demonstrated a moderately low frequency. Hence, despite a frequent exposure of youth to the online contents of political comedy, the overall frequency of the interacting with the contents remains low. Kolkata showed a slightly higher frequency. ANOVA analysis again revealed no significant differences across cities (p-value > 0.05).

The increased exposure to political comedy among young people in Kolkata (in terms of the length consumed as well as the interaction) could be due to the combination of reasons like a long history of satire culture (Paul & Nag, 2015), high political and media consciousness (Lahiri, 2014) due to historical political climate. Often referred to as India's intellectual capital (Bhattacharya, 2021), Kolkata has an extensive legacy of political comedy articulated through the arts, which might shape how youth there engage with the content in internet discussions.

4.3. Correlations between the consumption of online political comedy and political participation of the youth

The collected data was analysed to measure the impact of the Consumption of online political comedy (CH) on several facets of youth's political engagement in India.

Political Awareness: According to the means of the responses, political comedy on the internet has a moderately positive influence on political awareness (3.33). Respondents were forced to look for additional information from other news sources and were more inclined to utilize online comedic sources for political news.

Political Opinion: Comedy appears to be less successful in confirming or validating preexisting beliefs, even if it can still affect how opinions are formed (3.39). On the other hand, it may provoke critical thought by refuting and challenging political beliefs.

Political Expression: Comedy seems to promote political expression, as seen by respondent's increased propensity to share information, debate subjects with peers, and offer commentary on political matters.

Political Activism: Based on respondent's low levels of attendance at demonstrations or rallies, the data indicates that comedy has a little effect on political activism.

Political Decision: Comedy can help people make well-informed judgments, but its overall impact on political decision-making appears to be moderate.

4.4. Correlation (model testing)

The proposed model was developed on the hypothesis that the independent variable i.e., consumption habit (CH) of online political comedy, has a statistically significant relationship with the political engagement (PE) of the youth of India. Here, SmartPLS was used for PLS-model estimation. It is important to note that PLS interprets the latent variable as the weighted sum of each indicator (Chin & Newsted, 1999). PLS uses multiple regressions to forecast values for the latent variables. To determine if path coefficients were significant, t values were computed using a proven bootstrapping process (Chatelin et al., 2002). PLS was run with stable findings for 669 responses.

P value: The p-values associated with the path coefficients for Consumption Habits on all the indicators of Political Engagement including political awareness (PA1 & PA2), political opinion (PO1, PO2 & PO3) political expression (PEX1, PEX2 & PEX3), political activism (PAC1) and political decision (PD1 & PD2) were found to be highly significant ($p < .001$) (Table 7 & 8). This indicates an extremely low probability of observing such strong relationships between the variables by chance.. These findings provide strong empirical support for the linkages between political comedy consumption and political engagement. Hence, the study concludes that there is a statistically significant relationship between the consumption of online political comedy with political awareness, political opinion, political expression, political activism and political decision.

T-statistics ($|O/STDEV|$): T-statistics assess the significance of the path coefficients. The higher the absolute value of the T-statistic, the more significant the path coefficient. In this case, {CH -> PE (i.e., the effect of Consumption Habit on Political Engagement) the T-statistic is relatively high, indicating a significant relationship.

Path Coefficient (CH -> PE i.e., the effect of Consumption Habit on Political Engagement): The path coefficient linking Consumption Habit to Political Engagement (CH -> PE) was calculated to be 0.270, indicating a positive relationship between the two constructs. While statistically significant, the magnitude of the coefficient suggests a weak association. This implies that an increase in the consumption of online political comedy correlates with a slight increase in political engagement among youth. However, the influence is modest, suggesting that other factors may play a more substantial role in shaping political engagement.

5. Discussion

The study reveals a mixed consumption pattern of political comedy on online media, ranging from fairly positive to moderately negative. Firstly, the study affirms the popularity of online political comedy among Indian youth as access to such content was observed to be inclined more towards the frequent side of the spectrum. This trend can be attributed to the ability of political comedy to fulfil both entertainment (Prior, 2003) and informational needs, offering a unique 'eudaimonic entertainment experience' as described by Becker (2020). This dual function likely contributes to the enduring appeal of such content among this demographic.

Despite the popularity of online political comedy, a significant portion of youth reported inadvertent exposure to such content. This suggests that a) content of political comedy is ubiquitous online, and b) individuals often lack direct control over the consumption of humorous yet politically charged material. Given the algorithmic nature of internet-based platforms, which personalize content based on past choices (Carr, 2010), it is not surprising that unintentional exposure to political comedy can create an involuntary echo chamber (Garimella et al., 2018; Carr, 2010). By consistently presenting political content aligned with one's existing ideology, these platforms can reinforce and amplify political opinions, contributing to a state of political polarization. The argument is also supported in the work of Boukes & Hameleers (2023), whose findings suggest that the content of political comedy, rather than mitigating partisan divides, may actually intensify them. Specifically, exposure to political satire appears to reinforce pre-existing unfavourable perceptions of opposing political groups, thereby deepening ideological entrenchment among those with established partisan orientations.

The findings suggest that youth do not even end up watching half of the content of political comedy and almost half of the population end up watching less than three minutes of the content. Such limited engagement with online political comedy content among youth, as evidenced by their tendency to prematurely abandon lengthy videos or articles aligns with the widely documented decline in attention span in the digital age (Fillmore, 2015; Wu, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2024). This supports the assertion that while content of political comedy may effectively capture attention, its ability to provide a substantive understanding of complex political issues remains limited (Hollander, 2005). Furthermore, the reluctance of youth to actively participate in online political comedy discourse through likes, comments, and shares suggests a largely passive consumption pattern. This observation challenges the notion of online political comedy as a 'new public sphere,' as proposed by Paul (2017). Hence, instead of fostering active civic engagement and critical thinking, as a public sphere would ideally do, online political comedy may be contributing to a more passive and superficial form of political consumption. This raises questions about the long-term implications of such trends for democratic participation and the quality of public discourse.

The analysis of the correlation between the consumption of online political comedy and the political engagement of youth also presents a multifaceted landscape, demonstrating the potential benefits and drawbacks of the phenomenon. The statistically significant and positive relationship between the two corroborates the prior findings pertaining to the implications of political comedy on various indicators of the political engagement of youth. Hence, the study tends to be in consonance with the dominant global scholarship advocating positive associations of consumption of political comedy with consumer's political awareness (Xenos & Becker, 2009; Gregorowicz, 2013), political opinion (Kucera, 2015), political expression (Shifman, 2014; Kumar, 2015), political activism (Lee, 2014; Penney, 2017), as well as political decision (Lee, 2014; Kulkarni, 2017). The study, therefore, presents stable evidence for reckoning political comedy as an effective form of political communication that holds the potential to engage youth in an entertaining fashion. While the correlation between online political comedy exposure and youth political engagement is statistically significant and positive, the strength of

this relationship is relatively weak. This observation can again be understood through the lens of youth consumption patterns on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, where content is often consumed in short, crisp yet visually appealing formats such as memes. Given the snackable nature of online content of political comedy, it requires minimal attention (Carr, 2010; Fillmore, 2015; Wu et al., 2018; Shahzad et al., 2024) and can effectively capture the interest of even politically disengaged youth. However, the superficial nature of such content limits its ability to foster a deep understanding of complex political issues, potentially leading to a shallow impact on youth political engagement. While online political comedy can be an effective tool for raising awareness and sparking initial interest, it may not be sufficient to drive meaningful and sustained political engagement. Online comedy may need to be complemented with other political education and engagement activities that offer possibilities for deeper inquiry and critical thinking in order to have a more significant effect on the youth's political engagement.

6. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that although online political comedy is relatively common among Indian youth, its consumption patterns are frequently characterized by minimal engagement and short attention spans. Despite the relatively high frequency of consumption, the survey finds that a sizable percentage of respondents come upon political comedy content by accident rather than actively seeking it out. A lack of sustained attention is also suggested by the fact that the majority of respondents find it difficult to view even half of the videos they do. Furthermore, the low levels of interaction with political comedy content, such as liking, commenting, or sharing, indicate a passive consumption pattern. This raises questions about the platform's ability to function as public spheres for meaningful political discourse.

While the study's findings are statistically significant and positive, the strength of the relationships is weak. This can be attributed to the "infotainment paradox of political comedy" (proposed by the researcher), a concept that captures the paradox of political debate and entertainment in online spaces. Building on Postman's (2006) proposition in "Amusing Ourselves to Death" that raises concerns on television's shift towards entertaining public debate, the 'infotainment paradox of political comedy' applies it to the internet, where political comedy is more likely to value entertainment over meaningful political debate. This suggests that while political comedy can be engaging, it may not always facilitate deep political engagement. In conclusion, the study suggests that digital political comedy has the potential to emerge as a persuasive form of communication. However, this phenomenon is a double-edged sword. While it can positively impact political awareness and activism, the one-sided dissemination of biased political information under the guise of entertainment, the passive nature of consumer engagement, and the limited ability to influence political opinion and decisions raise concerns. This creates fertile ground for the spread of propaganda and makes youth vulnerable to manipulation by politically motivated content creators.

This study provides a foundation for the investigation of political comedy as a facilitator of political engagement specifically in context of Indian youth. Future research can focus on the consumption and sharing habits of a specific format of political comedy, like news parody, memes, or stand-up comic on political issues. Discussions could also be expanded to the implications of those particular types of political comedy on the various aspects of political engagement. Also, it is crucial to remember, nevertheless, that the effect of political humor on young people's political involvement might differ based on personal characteristics including age, political beliefs, and exposure to other political material. While this paper does reflect on

the variance of the consumption of online political comedy across different cities, the rest of the demographic factors do not fall under the capacity of this paper.

Political comedy is not a panacea, but it can be a potent instrument for raising political consciousness and civic involvement. The limitations of political comedy must be acknowledged, and alternative means of political involvement and education must be added.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (Tables: demographic details, instrument validity & reliability)

Table 1. Gender-wise distribution

<i>Cities</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>New Delhi</i>	118	82	-	200
<i>Kolkata</i>	111	86	3	200
<i>Bengaluru</i>	117	83	-	200
<i>Pune</i>	116	84	-	200
<i>Total</i>	462	335	3	800

Table 2. Age-wise distribution

<i>Age-Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
18-23	341	42.625%
24-29	241	30.125%
30-35	218	27.25%
	800	

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability & AVE

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CH	0.703	0.730	0.817	0.531
PE	0.911	0.914	0.926	0.531

Table 4. T statistics & P values

	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CH1 <- CH	25.298	0.000
CH2<- CH	9.945	0.000
CH3 <- CH	30.283	0.000
CH4 <- CH	34.159	0.000
PA1 <- PE	36.247	0.000
PA2 <- PE	25.315	0.000
PAC1 <- PE	29.118	0.000
PD1 <- PE	30.677	0.000
PD2 <- PE	25.156	0.000
PEX1 <- PE	39.349	0.000
PEX2 <- PE	46.872	0.000
PEX3 <- PE	39.235	0.000
PO1 <- PE	24.405	0.000
PO2 <- PE	31.372	0.000
PO3 <- PE	25.982	0.000

Appendix II (Findings)

Table 5. Consumption of online political comedy among urban Indian youth; mean & ANOVA significance

Indicators	Cities	Min/Max	Mean	Sig.
CH1				
Frequency of Consuming Online Political Satire	New Delhi	Min: Never (1)	3.25	0.444
	Bengaluru		3.15	
	Pune	Max: Always (5)	3.04	
	Kolkata		3.18	
	Total		3.15	
CH2				
Intentionally Search for the Content of Political Comedy Online	New Delhi	Min: Never (1)	2.73	0.151
	Bengaluru		2.95	
	Pune	Max: Always (5)	2.7	
	Kolkata		2.93	
	Total		2.83	
CH3				
Length of Content on Online Political Comedy Watched In One Go	New Delhi	Min: Less than a quarter (1)	2.58	0.023
	Bengaluru		2.47	
	Pune	Max: Full (5)	2.62	
	Kolkata		3.11	
	Total		2.7	
CH4				
Interaction (Like/Comment/Share) with the Content of Online Political Comedy	New Delhi	Min: Never (1)	2.91	0.095
	Bengaluru		2.96	
	Pune	Max: Always (5)	2.72	
	Kolkata		3.05	
	Total		2.91	

Table 6. Political engagement means (city -wise)

Variables	Indicators	New Delhi	Kolkata	Bengaluru	Pune	Overall
Political Awareness	Use Online Sources of Political Comedy to Get Political News/Views	3.14	3.4	3.55	3.28	3.34
	Get Compelled to Search the Political Information on Other News Sources after Viewing/Hearing its Mention on Online Political Comedy	3.27	3.35	3.54	3.18	3.33
Political Opinion	Online political comedy helps you form opinions on political news	3.43	3.5	3.65	3.28	3.47
	Reinforce or validate your political opinion by consuming the contents of online political comedy	3.1	3.23	3.44	3.18	3.24
	Help you Challenge and Rethink your Own Political Opinion	3.48	3.41	3.55	3.44	3.47
Political Expression	Comment Views on Political Issues Discussed in the Online Content of Political Comedy	2.53	2.63	2.87	2.57	2.65
	Share the Contents of Political Comedy on Social Media as an Extension (to Support or Criticize) of One's own Political Opinion	2.74	2.98	2.88	2.69	2.82
	Discuss the Political Issues Conversed in Online Political Comedy with Peers	3.21	3.38	3.32	3.12	3.26
Political Activism	Take part in rallies/demonstrations/protests for or against any political cause after consuming the online content/s of political comedy on the same issue	2.45	2.49	2.65	2.44	2.51
Political Decision	Assist in Making Informed Political Decisions	3.25	3.51	3.16	3.47	3.35
	Influence Overall Political Decision	3.1	3.43	2.97	3.42	3.23
	Overall	3.06	3.21	3.23	3.09	3.15

Appendix III (Questionnaire for survey)

Questionnaire for Survey

Greetings! I am *****, from *****, and I am conducting a research on the topic, " A WHIMSICAL WISDOM: EXPLORING CONSUMPTION OF ONLINE POLITICAL COMEDY AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH IN INDIA" for which I seek your response to the following questions. Political comedy in this study refers to the broad term encompassing any form of humorous content (whether text, audio, or video) that addresses political matters such as events, policies, political parties, politicians, or institutions on digital platforms like websites, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. Some of the examples include political memes, stand-up performances, news parodies, and satirical news commentaries, etc. The following questionnaire intends to assess the consumption behavior of political comedy on digital media and ascertain its implications on their political engagement. Your response is valuable to us and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Section 1

1. This section aims to gather the demographic details of the respondents.

- 1.1. Name: _____
- 1.2. e-mail: _____
- 1.3. Gender * (Mark only one option.)
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other: _____
- 1.4. Age: * _____
- 1.5. City of Residence * (Mark only one option.)
 - Delhi
 - Bengaluru
 - Kolkata
 - Pune

Section 2. Consumption Behaviour of Political Comedy on Social Media: This section will assess the consumption behaviour of political comedy on social media, its usage among youth

2.1. Have you ever come across the contents of political comedy on social media? *

- Yes
- No

2.2. If yes, how frequently do you end up seeing/ watching online content of political comedy (including satirical/ humorous monologues on politics) on social media? *(Mark only one option.)

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

2.3. Rate on the mentioned scale responding to how frequently you do the following activities regarding political comedy: (The questions are put on the left and the right, it seeks your response) *

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Search intentionally for the content of political comedy on social media,					
Come across the contents of political comedy on social media by chance.					
Interact (like/comment/share with content of online political comedy.					

- 2.4. What length of a video on political comedy do you usually prefer watching in one go? (Mark only one option)
- Less than 3 minutes
 - 4-6 minutes
 - 7-9 minutes
 - 10 minutes or more than 10 minutes

- 2.5. What length of the content (in the case of long videos lasting for more than 10 minutes) on political comedy do you usually finish watching in one go? *(Mark only one option.)*
- Less than a quarter of the full video
 - A quarter of the full video
 - Half of the full video
 - More than half of the full video
 - Full video

4. Effects of Consumption of Online Political Comedy on Political Engagement of Youth.

This section will measure whether or not the online content of political comedy has a positive impact on the political engagement of the youth of the nation.

4.1. Read the following statements regarding the relationship between online political comedy and political engagement and mark your response on the mentioned scale responding to how often you do the following? Tick only the single option for each question

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Use online sources of political comedy to get political news.					
2. Get compelled to search for political information on other news sources after viewing/hearing its mention on online political comedy.					
3. Reinforce or validate your political opinion after consuming the contents of online political comedy.					
4. Comment your views (in the comment section) on political issues discussed in the online content of political comedy.					
5. Share the contents of political comedy on social media as an extension (to support or criticize) of your own political opinion					
6. Discuss the political issues conversed through online political comedy with your peers (friends and family) after consuming them.					
7. Take part in rallies/ demonstrations/ protests for or against any political cause after consuming the online content/s of political comedy on the same issue.					

4.2. Answer responding to how frequently the consumption of online political comedy makes you do the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Online political comedy helps you form an opinion on political news.					
2. Help you challenge and rethink your own political opinion about issues.					
3. Assist you in making informed political decisions.					
4. Contributes in influencing your political decision.					

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