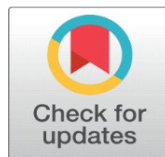# INTERNET SHUTDOWN: A STRATEGY TO MANAGE SOCIAL UNREST IN MANIPUR AND ITS IMPACT ON COLLEGE-GOING YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital era, the internet is integral to nearly every aspect of life. However, frequent internet shutdowns have been imposed in Manipur due to various factors to maintain peace and tranquillity in the state. Following ethnic violence that erupted in Manipur on May 3, 2023, an internet shutdown was imposed. It lasted until December 3, 2023, making it the longest in the Northeast and the most extended lockdown in 2023. The present study aimed to examine the impact of this internet shutdown on college students. The study surveyed 401 college students from eight colleges and found that the shutdown significantly affected their academic pursuits, access to information, social interactions, entertainment, and online banking and purchasing activities. Moreover, the student's emotional well-being was adversely affected, and they were "anxious" (90%), felt life had come to a standstill (71.3%), felt depressed (69.1%), no longer enjoyed carrying out routine tasks (64.1%), felt less connected to their friends (60.3%) and felt depressed (69.1%). The findings also indicated that most respondents felt dependent on the internet during the shutdown.

Keywords: Manipur, Internet Shutdown, Effects, College-Going Youths

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet shutdown is "an intentional disruption of the internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information" (Keepiton, 2021). Internet shutdowns usually fall under two main categories: A total shutdown wherein all online services are disabled, focusing on mobile Internet access or fixed lines, such that users in a country or region cannot access the Internet. A partial shutdown, where content-blocking techniques are applied to restrict access to websites or applications, often blocks people from communicating or sharing (ISOC, 2017). Further, there are two types of internet shutdowns. The first one is Preventive- these are shutdowns imposed in anticipation of an event that may require the Internet to be suspended by the state. The second type is a reactive shutdown - these are shutdowns imposed to contain ongoing law and order situations and are imposed once an event begins. India has come to be known as the Internet shutdown capital of the world (Sflc.in).

The problem of internet shutdowns has significantly increased in India over the past decade. In 2023, there were 79 internet shutdowns in India by November, compared to just three in 2012. The number of shutdowns in the previous years was 136, 109, 132, and 100 in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021, respectively. According to the SFLC.In., India recorded 771 instances of internet shutdown between 2012 and 2023. As per Surf Shark's biannual report on global internet shutdowns, India ranked second globally in the first half of 2023.The increasing incidents of internet shutdowns across India arose from political compulsion, and Manipur is no exception. Manipur is a state with multiple issues ranging from human rights violations under the Armed Forces Special Power Act., problems of population influx, territorial boundary issues, child rights, communal riots, ethnic tensions, etc. The instances of internet shutdown are not new in Manipur, but the most recent one occurred from 3rd May, 2023 till December 3rd, 2023. Following ethnic violence broke out in the state on May 3, 2023. By September 2023, the violence killed more than 175 people and 1108 injured, while 32 were missing, 4,786 houses were burnt, and 60,000 people were displaced from their homes (Times of India September 15, 2023). On December 3, 2023 the Manipur government lifted ban on mobile internet services in large part of the state, however, the ban continued in the border areas of the nine districts (Governor, Manipur, No.H-3607/4/2022-HD.Pt.).

Looking at state-wise figures of the instances of internet shutdown, Jammu and Kashmir are at the top, with 424, followed by Rajasthan and Manipur, with 98 and 34 respectively. According to the internet shutdown tracker, Manipur's internet shutdown from 3rd May 2023 till December 3rd, 2023 is the longest in the Northeast and the most prolonged lockdown in 2023. The shutdown is the most extended outside of the State of Kashmir (Sflc.in 2023).

In today's digital era, everything depends on the Internet. Without the Internet, life is just at a standstill. Due to prolonged shutdowns in the state, people from all walks of life face many difficulties in performing their day-to-day activities. One such group is college students, as a quality education requires access to the Internet. Nowadays, students use the Internet more than books. For college students, shutting down the Internet is not only curtailing social media. Additionally, it entails restricting students' access to information and learning opportunities and their ability to use the e-learning resources available on the World Wide Web. The implications of the frequent internet outages in Manipur, both in a broader context and concerning pertinent media research, have yet to receive significant attention. This study aims to thoroughly analyse the effects of internet shutdowns on the youth population, particularly college students in Manipur. Therefore, the present study was undertaken with the objectives:

1) To explore the impact of the internet shutdown on college students' varied activities.
2) To explore college students' emotional well-being during the internet shutdown.
3) To determine whether college students' internet dependence during the shutdown is related to the selected demographic factors—gender, social class, course of study and time spent online before the shutdown.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on undergraduate students enrolled in the academic year 2023–2024 in eight different arts, science and commerce colleges in the Imphal East and West districts of Manipur. A total of 401 students volunteered to participate in the survey. Before the survey, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, informed and verbal consent was obtained from them. The participants consist of 188 females and 213 males. Variables include gender, social class, course of study and time spent online before the shutdown.

3. DESIGN OF QUESTIONNAIRE AND DATA COLLECTION

The participants self-administered a structured questionnaire comprising seventeen closed-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: the first section gathered demographic information, the second section focused on internet usage patterns, and the third section addressed the effects of the internet shutdown. The survey was carried out during the complete internet shutdown in Manipur.

4. TOOL AND TECHNIQUES

A five-point Likert scale has been used to assess the impact of the internet shutdown on college students' varied activities. Further, the reliability level is checked using the KMO test, which is 0.071. Simple mathematics such as Percentage, Mean, Std-deviation, etc., have been used in data analysis. Factor analysis was used to find the association

between respondents' level of dependency on the internet during the internet shutdown and selected demographic factors (gender, social class, course of study, and time spent online before the shutdown, Table 1)).

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Profiles of the college-going youths under study n=401.

Items Descriptive		Frequency	Percentage
Category	General	104	25.9
	OBC	215	53.6
	SC	17	4.2
	ST	65	16.2
Age	17-18 Age	6	1.5
	18-19 Age	106	26.4
	19 and Above Age	289	72.1
Gender	Female	188	46.9
	Male	213	53.1
Place of residence	Rural	215	53.6
	Urban	186	46.4
Marital status	Married	5	1.2
	Unmarried	396	98.8
Course of study	B.Sc.	223	55.6
	B. A	153	38.2

Sample Characteristics

Table 1, shows the social category representation of the respondents; OBC makes up 53.6%, followed by generals (24.9%), ST (16.2%), and SC (4.2%). Youths from rural areas are more represented (53.6%) than those from urban areas (46.4%). According to the course of study, 55.6% of the students are B.Sc., 38.2% are B.A., and 6.2% are B.Com. Regarding the youths' gender, the male group (53.1%) outnumbered the female group (46.9%).

Internet Usage Habits

Table 2: Internet usage habits of the respondents.

Items Descriptive		Frequency	Percentage
Internet experience	Less than 1 Year	9	2.2
	1-2 Year	62	15.5
	3-4 Year	126	31.4
	5 More than	204	50.9
Mode of internet connection	Mobile data	369	92.0
	Broadband	113	28.2
	College wi-fi	31	7.7
Device used for internet access	Mobile	396	98.8
	Desktop	22	5.5
	Laptop	74	18.5

	I-pad/tablet	10	2.5
Daily time spent on the Internet before the shutdown	0-2 hours per day		8.7
	2-4 hours per day		59.8
	Above 4 hours per day		31.7

Table 2 shows the internet-using habits of the respondents; 50.9% of the respondents have been using the Internet for over five years, 31.4% for three to four years, 15.5% for one to two years, and only 2.2% for less than a year.

For the mode of internet connection, most respondents (92.0%) rely on mobile data, followed by broadband (28.0%) and college Wi-Fi (7.7%). For devices used to access the internet, 98.8% use mobile phones, followed by desktops (5.5%), laptops (18.5%), and iPads/tablets (2.5%). Before the internet shutdown, 59.6% of respondents spent 2-4 hours online daily. They were followed by users who spent 4+ hours (31.7%) and users who spent 0–2 hours (8.7%).

The Impact of the Internet Shutdown on College Students' Varied Activities

Table 3 shows that 47.4% of respondents felt the internet shutdown significantly impacted their ability to carry out various activities. In comparison, 30.3% thought they had a high impact, 14.9% had a neutral effect, 5.2% had a low effect, and 2.1% had no effect.

Table 3: The impact of the internet shutdown on college-going Students' varied

Items	Frequency with Percentage					Mean	Std. Deviation
	Extremely effect	**Moderately effect**	**Neutral**	**Low effect**	**No effect**		
Academic activities	267	89	32	6	7	1.49	0.843
	66.6%	22.2%	8.0%	1.5%	1.7%		
Information access activities	227	139	27	5	3	1.54	0.740
	56.6%	34.7%	6.7%	1.2%	0.7%		
Socializing activities	146	149	75	24	7	1.99	0.975
	36.4%	37.2%	18.7%	6.0%	1.7%		
Entertainment activities	120	132	104	30	15	2.22	1.072
	29.9%	32.9%	25.9%	7.5%	3.7%		
Banking and purchasing online	191	98	61	40	11	1.95	1.129
	47.6%	24.4%	15.2%	10.0%	2.7%		
Total	951	607	299	105	43		
Total Percentage	47.4%	30.3%	14.9%	5.2%	2.1%		
Rank	5	4	3	2	1		

Academic Activities: It is clear from Table 3 that 66.6% of the respondents have experienced a significant impact on their educational activities. Academic activities have a mean effect score of 1.49, indicating a moderate level of impact. It stood fifth in the mean impact score.

Information Access Activities: Approximately 91.3% of respondents said that internet outages had moderate to extreme effects on their information access activities. It stood fourth in the mean impact score with 1.54.

Socializing Activities: Around 73.6% of respondents indicated moderate to extreme effects on their socializing activities. The average effect score for socializing activities is 1.99 and placed second in the mean impact score, indicating that socializing activities were considerably affected.

Entertainment Activities: Approximately 62.8% of respondents had a moderate to severely negative influence on their entertainment activities. The average effect score for entertainment activities is 2.22, the highest of any activities, indicating that entertainment activities have been seriously affected.

Banking and Online Purchase: Approximately 72.0% of respondents reported a moderate to strongly influencing impact on banking and online purchases. The average impact score is 1.95, ranking second among the activities. It has the third-highest mean effect score, indicating that online banking and purchasing have been considerably affected.

The College Student's Emotional Well-being During the Internet Shutdown.

From Table 4, it is observed that Feelings of being "disturbed," "depressed," and "I feel life came to a standstill" were relatively common among college students during the internet shutdown, with percentages ranging from 51.9% to 71.3%.

Table 4: College students' emotional well-being during the Internet shutdown.

Emotional well-being during the internet shutdown	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel disturbed	Yes	208	51.9%	0.48	.500
	No	193	48.1%		
I feel depressed	Yes	277	69.1%	0.31	0.463
	No	124	30.9%		
I feel anxious	Yes	361	90.0%	0.1	0.3
	No	40	10.0%		
I feel less connected to my friends	Yes	242	60.3%	0.4	0.49
	No	159	39.7%		
I no longer enjoy carrying out routine tasks	Yes	257	64.1%	0.36	0.48
	No	144	35.9%		
I feel life has come to a standstill	Yes	286	71.3%	0.29	0.453
	No	115	28.7%		
Total		401	100.0		

A significant proportion of students reported feeling "anxious" and "I no longer enjoy carrying out routine tasks," with 90 % and 64.1%, respectively. Feelings about social connections, such as "feel less connected to my friends," were indicated by a smaller proportion of respondents (60.3%).

The intensity and variability of the students' reported feelings were evaluated using mean scores and standard deviations. The top reported feeling was "disturbed" at 0.48, followed by "I no longer enjoy carrying out routine tasks" at 0.36, "depressed" at 0.31, "I feel life has come to a standstill" at 0.29, "I feel less connected to my friends" at 0.4, and "anxious" at 0.1.

Association Between Respondents' Level of Dependency During the Internet Shutdown and Selected Demographic Factors.

Dependency on the Internet During the Internet Shutdown

During the Internet shutdown, 34.9% of respondents responded that they sometimes felt dependent on the Internet. Another 28.9 % of respondents said they frequently felt dependency on the internet, followed by dependency on the internet always with 22.9%. However, only 8% and 5.2% of the respondents experienced rarely and never felt the dependency on the internet.

Table 5.1: Rotated Component Matrix.

Componen t	Social Category	Gender	Daily Time Spent on the internet before shutdown (in hours)	Course study of study
1	0.973			
2		0.938		
3			0.998	
4				0.922

According to the Rotated Component Matrix table 5.1, the correlations between the original variables and the extracted factor closely related. The "Social Category" variable are represented by the magnitude of the loading of 0.973, indicating a strong relationship. The "Gender" variable loading (0.938) also shows a strong relationship. Furthermore, the "Daily Time Spent on Internet" variable loading (0.998) is highly related to the represented characteristics. Lastly, the "Course study" variable loading (0.922) defines certain features.

Table 5.2: Correlation showing the respondents' level of dependency during the internet shutdown, along with selected demographic factors.

Items	Correlation with Dependency Internet	Significance (2-tailed)	Result
Social Category	0.104	0.038	Significant
Gender	0.046	0.360	Insignificant
Daily Time Spent on the Internet before the shutdown	0.156	0.002	Significant
Course of study	0.040	0.040	Significant

Table 5.2 shows that the demographic variable of the social category has a positive association of 0.104. This implies that as the category increases, indicating a more significant degree within that category so does the reliance on the internet. This link is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.038, implying a meaningful association. The gender demographic variable has a positive association of 0.046 with internet dependency, although this link is not statistically significant. This shows that in this sample, there is little to no relevant connection between gender and internet dependency during the internet shutdown. The daily time spent on the internet before the internet shutdown has a statistically significant positive connection of 0.156 with internet dependency during the internet shutdown. This shows that dependence on the internet during the internet outage tends to become more evident as daily time on the internet increases—the low p-value of 0.002 indicates a statistically significant, meaningful, and more vital link. The demographic variable of the course of study and internet dependency during the internet outage has a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.040. This implies that as the course of study changes or varies, the reliance on the Internet increases gradually. The p-value of 0.040 suggests this correlation is statistically significant, signifying a meaningful association.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study indicates that college students heavily rely on their smartphones to go online, with 98.8% using mobile phones as their primary Internet access device. This finding is consistent with a study by Borgohain et al. (2019) in Guwahati, where 100% of the respondents reported using mobile phones to access the internet.

The present study revealed that 47.4% of college students reported a significant impact on their ability to carry out various activities due to internet shutdowns. Additionally, 66.6% of respondents experienced an extreme and 22.2% moderate effect on their educational activities. This finding aligns with studies conducted by Laishram (2024) in Imphal,

Misgar et al. (2021) in Kashmir and Upadhyay et al. (2022) in Ranchi, Jharkhand where 83.7%, 74.04% and 75% of participants respectively, indicated that their studies and research work were affected by sudden internet shutdowns.

Regarding entertainment activities, the present study shows that 62.8% of respondents felt that the internet shutdown had a moderate to severe negative influence on their entertainment activities. The average effect score for entertainment activities is 2.22, the highest of any activities, indicating that entertainment activities have been seriously affected. This finding aligned with the study by Laishram (2024), where around 77.7% of the medical students stated that they could not enjoy the entertainment programs due to the internet shutdown. The findings are dissimilar to a study conducted by Upadhyay (2022), where 51.2% of the students said that the internet shutdown had affected their entertainment activities.

In the present study, college students' emotional well-being during an internet shutdown was explored, and a significant proportion of students reported feeling "anxious" (90%) and expressing a lack of enjoyment in carrying out routine tasks (64.1%). A smaller proportion of respondents (39.7%) indicated feeling less connected to their friends. These findings were comparable to a study conducted by Borgohain et al. (2019) in Guwahati, where respondents expressed feeling upset (43%), depressed (8%), and experiencing a loss of connectivity with friends (46%) and interest in day-to-day activities (22%) during an internet blackout.

In the present study, during the Internet shutdown, 34.9% of respondents felt occasional dependency on the Internet, while 28.9% felt frequent dependency, and 22.9% felt dependency rarely. This contrasts with the study by Borgohain et al. (2019), where 70% of respondents reported occasional dependency on the Internet, 15% reported frequent dependency, and only 15% reported never feeling dependent. The dissimilar finding may be due to differences in participant characteristics.

In analysing the relationship between respondents' level of dependency during an internet shutdown and selected demographic factors, the present study observed statistically meaningful associations with the daily time spent on the internet before the shutdown (p = 0.002). This finding contrasts with a survey by Borgohain et al. (2019), which found no meaningful associations between internet use per day before an internet shutdown and dependency during the shutdown, with p-values of 0.385. The differences in findings may be attributed to the heterogeneity of the study samples.

7. CONCLUSION

In today's digital era, imagining life without the internet is challenging. The internet has become a vital necessity for survival in this age of technology. The frequent and prolonged internet shutdowns in Manipur have caused significant inconvenience to the public. The state's younger population has been particularly affected, as their reliance on the Internet for essential needs has intensified. This prolonged shutdown is expected to widen the digital divide within the country. It poses a challenge to the Government of India's Digital India initiative, which aims to empower India digitally and build a knowledge economy (Digital India, 2023).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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