



Empowered Youth Driving Digital Movements for Sustainability and Ethical Values

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on empowered youth driving digital movements for sustainability and ethical values in the global scenario. Youths especially from India have been using YouTube and other social media platforms for various reasons. They are active each day and explore new things to show to society personally and in the community. Various youth and youth organisations are dedicated to a particular issue or concern of humanity and nature. Many focus on birds, fish, climate change, animals, and organic culture nutritious foods. By involving in a group and taking a personal interest in a specific field youth are highlighting the issues of the environment and sustainability. Youths are leading the charge towards sustainability and ethics in today's digital world. With the help of social media, digital organisations, and online social movements, young people are promoting awareness around preserving the Earth, being a part of climate action, and moral responsibility. It is through various campaigns led by youths, whether global issues, social awareness on education, health, and any other burning issues are content for social media trends or viral challenges in their communities that are challenged to adopt sustainable behaviors and ethical practices in our society. By adapting innovative technologies for positive change, today's youth are not only advocating for a greener planet but also forming a future based on responsibility, compassion, and integrity. Further, the success stories in education, dairy, farming, sericulture, aquaculture, and organic farming, leading a healthy and happy life in rural areas, and connecting globally with digital media have become possible and it is also a positive motivation to the rest of the world. Many more are dedicating and showing concern for lakes, pure drinking water, eco-friendly living, minimal usage of artificial and man-made products, and reliance on natural products for living. Secondary sources were used in the research paper and restricted to the youth movements using digital media in the Indian scenario.

Keywords: Empowered youth, movements, digital media, sustainability, ethical values.

Introduction

Youth have become a very powerful force for change in the digital world. Whether advocating on behalf of the environment or becoming more conscious of how their lives impact the environment, empowered young people from India and elsewhere are now creating awareness, advocacy, and action for causes and purposes using platforms like YouTube and other social media. Youth are using these platforms to change the world, whether in their communities or even on a global scale. For example, social media has compensated to a great degree for social networks that may not involve or foster personal interaction, and youth can come together, not only to advocate, but to tell others how to have better values regarding compassion, responsibility, and acknowledging our impact on the ecosystem. In this "digital landscape," youth are applying their strategies in conducting personal acts of service and philanthropy, as well as collectively as organizations. Youth-led organizations are now tackling important issues such as climate change, biodiversity, organic farming, clean water access, and consumption practices. Youth and student-led organizations can blend this traditional knowledge with modern information and media technologies to help shape a

better Animalia, as well as a more sustainable and ethical future. This study explores youth-led digital movements within India using secondary data while commenting on the urgency and vibrancy of youth activism in nations like India at a time when climate and environmental crises are at our doorstep, and as our sustainable development and human rights seem to be lagging.

Review of Literature

The literature acknowledges young people's importance to digital movements related to sustainability and ethics. Marsini argues that we can support youth's empowerment and ability to take an active role in online activism with an ethical underpinning through education, and integrating digital ethics into the school curriculum is an effective route (Marsini 5). Youth increasingly use Instagram, X handle, and TikTok to voice their concerns, raise awareness, and garner support for the myriad of environmental and social causes (Sustainable Living Foundation). However, the evidence base highlights various barriers to effective engagement, including digital divides, language disparities, harassment, and echo chamber effects (Mundkur and Ellickson-Brown). To assist youth in

overcoming hurdles, institutions should promote digital literacy, multilingual forms of communication, and encourage each youth to have exposure and sift through different perspectives. The literature points to the potential for youth to be agents of positive change, when armed with the right tools and information, to promote sustainability and ethics, within digital movements.

The accompanying impact of Gen Z in enhancing sustainability through the functionalities and capacities of digital platforms, Polydorou (2022) ^[4] scrutinises the angle of youth, technology, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She captures their enthusiasm as digital natives for using technology to shape external ways of knowing, and seeing, and citizen engagement, reflecting trends to raise awareness, developing transnational communities, collective action and mobilising for sustainability. The engagement is inherently non-Western and is reflective of a larger global scope of youth-led digital engagement. Although the study offers recommendations, the author cautions about the disadvantages of relying on digital spaces and their limits as a single platform, including access to technology, the digital divide, misinformation, and lower quality of engagement lacking the nuance of the in-person face. Nonetheless, the studies reinforce the assertion that Gen Z does have the capability to impact global sustainability initiatives, provided their participation is enabled through inclusive and ethical digital systems.

Recent research has increasingly focused on the intersection of mobile technologies and youth-led sustainability movements. Calderaro and Treré (2017) ^[5] examine how mobile technologies, especially mobile devices, can empower young people to take part in digital activism, particularly concerning environmental and sustainability issues. The research has shown that mobile technologies do not just offer access to information, but also create opportunities for real-time communication, coordination, and distribution of activist messages, resulting in shifts in the organizational structure of activism from more traditional, hierarchical organizational forms to decentralized and horizontal organizational forms that support broader participation. The authors also note limitations to their research, such as the previous digital divides that can still block equal access and participation, and concerns around surveillance and censorship by platforms. Nevertheless, the results suggest that mobile technologies play a vital role in shaping how contemporary youth activism for sustainability takes shape (Calderaro and Treré) ^[5].

Lombana-Bermudez *et al.* (2020) wrote about "Youth and the Digital Economy: Exploring Youth Practices, Motivations, Skills, Pathways, and Value Creation," which provided a useful discussion for analyzing how youth engage with the digital economy. Their research found youth engage in the digital economy based on a combination of "interest-based," "social," and "economic" motivations. The report describes how youth seem to have a more direct and natural way of skill acquisition when it comes to digital engagement. Rather than the formal content-driven manner through school, youth were acquiring skills through informal interactions with peers and online communities. It was interesting how they capture aspects of youth creating content as "aspirational labor," because while they are spending time and energy making content, they may not see direct economic returns, implying it's still an investment. Lastly, the report highlighted the presence of infrastructures and supportive policies for youth to engage in the digital economy spaces and develop pathways for youth effectively. This report builds on

knowledge of the possible impact on the social and economic engagement of youth with digital technologies.

Aim of the Study

To investigate how youth empowerment is driving activism via digital platforms, with a focus on examples in India, in specifying how their activism is improving awareness, impacting ecological responsibility, and catalysing or disrupting digital connectivity and/or transformation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the role of Indian youth as initiators and leaders of digital movements focused on environmental sustainability and ethical practices.
2. To identify the various digital platforms (YouTube, Instagram, X handle) being used by youth for advocacy and content creation on sustainability and moral values.
3. To explore the trends and issues taken up by youth-led digital campaigns, including but not limited to climate change, organic farming, biodiversity, clean water, and ethical consumerism.
4. To assess the challenges youth face in participating in digital activism, such as digital literacy, access inequality, and online harassment.
5. To assess the impact of youth-led digital movements on public discourse, community behaviours, and global awareness toward sustainable living.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study will focus on the empowered youth of India leading digital movements to share sustainability and ethical consciousness through social media and mobile technologies. This research focuses on advocacy, awareness-building, and digital engagement of empowered youth in India. This analysis is limited by geography to India. It draws on secondary data, which will not capture all the intricacies of personal experience nor emerging trends in youth activism outside India.

Discussion

Young people in India are using digital platforms as avenues for activism and ethical advocacy and are developing community-sourced initiatives. Youth activists in India are increasingly turning to digital platforms as tools in their activism and advocacy. Instagram, X handle, and YouTube have become spaces for environmental awareness, mobilization, and storytelling. Tuli and Danish (2021) ^[7] studied how Indian youth were able to use Instagram to protest against environmental injustices during COVID-19, using two main events: the death of a pregnant elephant in Kerala, and the Baghjan oil and gas leak in Assam. The digital campaigns exposed what was happening to the ecosystem, but also mobilized and engaged users' emotions across the country. Tuli and Danish (2021) ^[7] point out that youth-led online movements can reinterpret protest and shift narratives of nature and environmental injustices, and youth advocates can contribute to sustainability and ethical consciousness in a digital age. Digital social movements are rooted in hashtags, art, videos, and commentaries that create identifiable levels of digital solidarity and are inclusive of different forms of activism beyond geographical space and time.

Based on this, global organisations like UNICEF have supported the massive potential of young change-makers in climate and environmental action. A 2023 UNICEF article

stated that Indian youth have led climate and water conservation efforts, connecting with their communities virtually while presenting new, innovative sustainability ideas. These youth are more than just raising awareness; they are part of the policy conversation and using their digital presence to impact local and global conversations (Shendage). Their efforts reflect a larger shift towards value-based digital citizenship, in which compassion, responsibility, and environmental stewardship have become guiding principles. Examples like these illustrate how digitally empowered youth are not just consumers of media, but move makers, turning the technology into tools for significant social change based on ethical and ecological principles.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have been utilized increasingly by Indian youth to raise awareness of climate change and stimulate action on climate change issues. Rishika Pardikar's study demonstrates that social media has provided Indian youth with a platform to mobilize and engage a widerange of audience, in not only urban contexts but throughout the country and its various regions. Youth have been using digital platforms to support newly emerging digital campaigns focused on climate change issues and furthered their reach through viral hashtags and online petitions. Youth-led digital campaigns have become a focal point of the climate change movement, where participation is driven through digital platforms. Pardikar's study highlights that social media has provided youth with a powerful means of raising awareness regarding local environmental issues, affecting policy decisions, and inducing local community-based action. This organizational mobilization effort via social media is in conjunction with physical acts of activism such as climate strikes, which provide a platform to amplify the voices of youth raising awareness for the urgency of change within the environmental context. The findings point towards how social media has been critical in changing the youth climate change movement to a large and collaborative force across the globe. The Indonesian youth have shaped a public engagement effort in the fight against climate change in the broader fight against climate change.

Udupa *et al.* investigate the relationship between digital platforms and youth activism and how these platforms enable Indian youth to participate in political action as part of a global community. Their research shows that an increasing volume of youth are demonstrating examples of youth using social media to raise awareness and advocate for issues around climate change, sustainability, ethical consumption, and many other topics. The authors pointed out that with the use of digital activism, youth can build a transnational network to participate and mobilise as a group to engage in actions spanning these issues at a global level. The authors highlight the capacity of social media to empower youth as they shape the global digital politics landscape. In their analysis, Udupa *et al.* suggest that social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, allow youth to support and engage with causes outside of their home country. However, Udupa *et al.* acknowledge the barriers and challenges that youth face, particularly digital inequalities, misinformation, and the problem of navigating the online space in general as a youth. Despite these challenges, their research suggests that youth in India are using digital practices to support sustainability and ethical practices, showing the power of digital tools to create awareness and advocate for change in sustainable practices and ethical consumption tied to digital activism around the political and environmental discourse among millennials.

Research Findings

1. The youths in India have become increasingly active on digital platforms like Instagram, X handle, and YouTube, using these platforms to promote sustainability and ethical practices, notably in areas like climate change, biodiversity, clean water, and organic farming.
2. Youth-led digital movements typically utilise viral hashtags, online petitions, and compelling visuals to drive, as well as mobilize, action and awareness, resulting in movements like protests against the Baghjan oil spill, or the killing of a pregnant elephant in Kerala.
3. Social media offers a visible platform for youth to influence local policy and activate grassroots mobilization similar to previous campaigns that connect online activism to offline activism (e.g., climate strikes related to environmental protest).
4. Even with the ability of digital platforms to amplify youth-led activism, there are boundaries associated with their potential to build networks of participation in the global sustainability agenda, including barriers to digital literacy, access inequalities, and misinformation.
5. Youth in India are utilizing social media to build transnational networks advocating for sustainability and ethical consumption, illustrating how digital tools can empower youth to engage in global dialogues and shape future environmental policies.

Conclusion

This article has underscored the impact of empowered youth on digital platforms and their ability to lobby for issues relating to sustainability and ethics with a specific reference to India. Young people, particularly students, are using social media platforms like Instagram, X handle, and YouTube to promote environmental sustainability, ethical consumption, and social responsibility. They are undertaking campaigns related to climate change, organic farming, water conservation, etc., to raise awareness and inform public opinions toward influencing government policies. While social media can introduce challenges, for example, digital divides, harassment, and misinformation in their activism, when youth utilize digital tools creatively to create change, we are informed that they demonstrate resilience. The irony remains that youth are generally not engaged in activism in a specific physical space, but with technology, they can communicate globally and engage in networking while engaging for social and environmental justice. The future of youth activism on digital platforms looks good. As this article has suggested, there is tremendous potential for change that can be made collectively and with impact.

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