# From Memes to Mobilisation: The Cockroach Janta Party as a Form of Digital Political Participation among Indian Youth

**Rajeev Paripoornam[1] ✉, Millie Khanna[2]**

[1]Lovely Professional University, Punjab
[2]Independent Researcher, India

**Corresponding author(s):**
Rajeev Paripoornam
E-mail: rajeev.parioornam@gmail.com

Check for updates

**Keywords:** Meme politics, digital participation, Gen Z, political satire, participatory culture, Indian youth, social media, political communication, connective action, protest mobilization

**Received:** 07/04/2026
**Revised:** 08/05/2026
**Accepted:** 05/06/2026

© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

## Abstract

In May and June 2026, a satirical meme account called the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) amassed over 22 million Instagram followers within three weeks, surpassing the official follower count of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and becoming the largest online youth movement in the country's history. Within one month of its founding, the movement held its first offline protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, demanding the resignation of the Education Minister over examination paper leak scandals. This paper examines how meme-based satire facilitates political participation among Gen Z users through a comprehensive case study of the CJP phenomenon. Drawing on Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, political satire theory, digital citizenship frameworks, the concept of the networked public sphere, and engaging critically with Indian media scholarship, this study argues that the CJP represents a paradigmatic shift in political engagement—one where humour functions as political resistance, identity formation occurs through ironic affiliation ("Main Bhi Cockroach"), and participation manifests along a continuum from content creation and sharing to community building to offline protest mobilization. Through qualitative content analysis of CJP's Instagram presence, thematic analysis of engagement patterns across 78 posts, secondary analysis of public engagement metrics from multiple news sources, and event analysis of the June 6, 2026 protest, this research demonstrates that meme-based satire lowers barriers to political expression, transforms collective frustration into communal catharsis, enables young citizens to assert political agency within a constrained public sphere, and under specific conditions can serve as a pathway from online engagement to offline collective action. The paper concludes by examining the limitations of meme politics, the conditions enabling the transition from digital satire to street protest, and the implications for understanding democratic participation in the digital age.

## 1. Introduction

India is home to the world's largest Gen Z population — more than 380 million people between the ages of 15 and 29, or roughly 27 percent of the country's total population (United Nations Population Division, 2024). For the purposes of this study, "Gen Z" refers to

individuals born between 1997 and 2012; the UN's 15–29 age band approximates this cohort, though definitions vary across demographic sources. This is not merely a statistical bulge. It represents a generation coming of age under serious economic strain.

In early 2026, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy reported a graduate youth unemployment rate of 29.1 percent — a figure that climbs to 42 percent once underemployment and discouraged workers are included (CMIE, 2026). Research from Azim Premji University puts unemployment among graduates under 25 at around 40 percent (Bloomberg, 2026). Against this backdrop of economic anxiety, institutional disillusionment, and a widespread sense that government simply isn't listening, one ill-chosen phrase from a senior judge set off a political movement unlike anything India had seen in the digital age.

On May 15, 2026, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was hearing a petition about fraudulent degrees in the media industry when he made an offhand observation that would prove far more consequential than he intended. He suggested that "youngsters like cockroaches, who don't get any employment or have any place in the profession" end up in media, RTI activism, and social media where they "start attacking everyone" (Hindustan Times, 2026). The Chief Justice later clarified that he was specifically targeting individuals with fraudulent credentials, not young people in general. But the remark landed on years of accumulated frustration — about unemployment, repeated exam paper leaks, persistent inflation above 6 percent, and what many young Indians see as a sustained crackdown on political dissent (Al Jazeera, 2026;Associated Press, 2026). The clarification, in that context, didn't quite stick.

Within 24 hours, Abhijeet Dipke — a 30-year-old public relations graduate student at Boston University who had previously worked as a communications strategist for the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi from 2020 to 2023 — posted on X (formerly Twitter): "What if all cockroaches come together?" (PTI, 2026;AP, 2026). Using AI tools including Claude and ChatGPT, he built a website, set up social media accounts on Instagram, X, and Facebook, drafted a manifesto, and even wrote a party anthem for what he called the "Cockroach Janta Party" — a deliberate play on the name of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (ABP Live, 2026). The account crossed 3 million Instagram followers within 78 hours, 9 million within four days, and by May 21, 2026, had surpassed 14 million — overtaking the BJP's Instagram following of roughly 9 million (Outlook India, 2026). By early June 2026, the CJP's following had grown to over 22 million: more than double the BJP's 9.5 million and ahead of the main opposition Congress Party's 13.9 million (AFP, 2026;Bloomberg, 2026;AP, 2026).

Most significantly, on June 6, 2026, the CJP held its first offline protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. Hundreds gathered to demand the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over examination paper leak scandals. Many wore cockroach masks; others carried copies of the Indian Constitution. The memes had become a march (Mid-day, 2026;ABC News, 2026).

This paper investigates how meme-based satire encourages political participation among Gen Z users, using the Cockroach Janta Party as an instrumental case. It addresses three main questions: (1) What specific mechanisms transform online satire into collective political engagement among young Indians? (2) How does political humour function as resistance in contexts where direct dissent carries risks — and how does that function shift when movements move offline? (3) What does the CJP reveal about evolving patterns of youth political engagement, and what conditions allow meme-based movements to convert online followings into street protest?

The relevance of this study extends well beyond India. As democratic institutions worldwide grapple with declining youth participation and rising political disaffection, understanding how digital platforms and meme culture might re-engage young citizens is increasingly urgent (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). The CJP case is particularly instructive

because it combines several things that rarely coexist: organic grassroots emergence, extraordinarily rapid growth, explicit grounding in Gen Z communicative norms, substantive political grievances expressed through satirical form, and — critically — a demonstrated capacity for offline mobilization. That last element addresses the "conversion problem" that has long plagued analyses of digital activism: the gap between online enthusiasm and real-world action.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section two reviews relevant literature and outlines a theoretical framework. Section three describes the methodology. Section four presents findings across six thematic areas: identity reclamation, humour as resistance, the participation continuum from online to offline, distributed organizing, state response, and the June 6 protest as a critical case. Section five discusses theoretical and practical implications and points toward future research. Section six concludes by pulling together the main arguments and reflecting on what the CJP phenomenon suggests about the future of digital political participation.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Participatory Culture and Convergence Culture

Henry Jenkins' work on participatory culture provides an essential starting point for making sense of the CJP. In Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, Jenkins (2006) argued that contemporary media environments are defined by the collision of corporate content production and grassroots audience participation. This convergence gives rise to "participatory culture" — a formation in which consumers actively create and circulate media rather than passively receive it.

Jenkins (2009) identifies several core features of participatory cultures: low barriers to expression, strong norms around sharing, informal mentorship, a sense that contributions matter, and genuine social connection among participants. These features map directly onto how the CJP operated. The party had no formal structure, no paid staff beyond Dipke himself (Outlook India, 2026), and no conventional campaign infrastructure. Yet within days, millions of young Indians were following, sharing, creating derivative memes, signing membership Google Forms, and filling comment sections. The June 6 protest extended this participatory culture from screens to streets.

However, as Carpentier (2011) notes, Jenkins' framework — developed largely through analysis of Western media fandoms like science fiction conventions and fan fiction communities — may not fully account for the political constraints operating in non-Western settings. In environments where political expression is policed, the line between cultural participation and political dissent becomes genuinely fraught. When the Indian government blocked the CJP's X account and sent police to surveil Dipke's family home (Mid-day, 2026), what had looked like innocent meme-sharing revealed its political weight. The transition to visible protest — with identifiable participants in a public square-carried risks that Jenkins' original framework simply wasn't built to address.

### 2.2 Indian Media and Political Communication Scholarship

The Indian context calls for theoretical frameworks that are alert to the specific structural conditions of Indian democracy. Rajagopal (2001) showed how broadcast media transformed Hindu nationalism from a fringe movement into a dominant political force — demonstrating that Indian media doesn't merely transmit political messages but actively constitutes political publics. Punathambekar (2013) extended this analysis to digital platforms, examining how online spaces enable new forms of political belonging while reproducing existing hierarchies of caste, class, and language.

Most directly relevant to the CJP is scholarship on political satire and digital dissent in contemporary India. Saikia (2020) analysed the comedy collective All India Bakchod and found that satirical content created space for political commentary among urban youth who were otherwise disengaged from institutional politics. The AIB case showed that satire could say what traditional media avoided — but it remained primarily entertainment. The CJP was different: it wanted to mobilize.

Kaur (2019) examined memetic responses to the Citizenship Amendment Act protests and concluded that "memes function as a weapon of the weak — a form of symbolic resistance that mobilizes community and documents dissent without the risks associated with street protest" (p. 156). The CJP extends that scholarship in a significant direction: it demonstrates that memes can also be a precursor to street protest, not merely an alternative to it. This complicates the risk-calculation models that have dominated digital activism scholarship. Online participation, it turns out, can build the collective identity and sense of efficacy that make subsequent offline mobilization possible.

Menon (2012) has theorized how new media enables political mobilization that bypasses traditional party structures, especially for young people and women excluded from institutional politics. The CJP is a textbook example: it emerged entirely outside party channels, has no formal relationship with any opposition party, and has explicitly declined offers of support from established political actors. Whether that independence can be sustained as the movement grows remains an open question.

### 2.3 Political Satire Theory and the Carnivalesque

Political satire occupies a distinctive niche in political communication, working through what scholars describe as "ironic subtext, humour, and mockery to expose institutional absurdities and power asymmetries" (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 7). Unlike direct protest, satire creates what Bakhtin (1984) famously called the "carnivalesque" — a temporary space in which social hierarchies are inverted, authority is mocked, and normal rules are suspended.

Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais's medieval carnival remains influential. He argued that carnival laughter represents "the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts" (p. 92). Importantly, this laughter is ambivalent: it mocks and celebrates at once, destroys and renews. That ambivalence is satire's political utility. Participants can voice genuine critique while maintaining the deniability that "it was just a joke" — a crucial affordance in India, where sedition laws and anti-defamation provisions give direct political dissent a real cost.

Contemporary scholarship has extended Bakhtin's framework to digital media. Gray, Jones, and Thompson (2009) argue that satirical news programs like The Daily Show constitute a new genre of "pseudo-journalistic satire" that both entertains and informs, particularly among younger audiences who have drifted from traditional news. Baym (2005) similarly examines how The Daily Show blends news, comedy, and commentary into a hybrid form that resonates with digitally native generations.

The CJP extends this work by showing how a single satirical frame — the cockroach metaphor — can generate an entire political movement that eventually transitions from digital carnival to organized protest. But there is a tension in the "humour as cover" argument that deserves attention. If satire functions as legal protection by enabling plausible deniability, it simultaneously weakens political legibility. The cockroach mask can hide as well as protect. The CJP's June 6 protest required participants to shed that protective ambiguity and step into visible public space with specific, serious demands. Understanding how movements navigate that transition — from the suspension of norms characteristic of carnival to the serious

contestation of power characteristic of politics — is one of the central problems this paper addresses.

### 2.4 Digital Citizenship and the Slacktivism Debate

Scholarship on digital citizenship is divided between those who see online engagement as democratizing participation and those who dismiss it as "slacktivism" — symbolic gestures that feel meaningful but achieve little. This debate matters directly for evaluating the CJP, which relies heavily on precisely the low-effort actions that slacktivism critics find wanting.

The term was popularized by Morozov (2009; 2011), who argued that digital activism "feels good but achieves little" (2009, p. 1). In The Net Delusion, Morozov (2011) contended that online political engagement creates an "illusion of impact" that actually reduces the likelihood of substantive offline action. Liking a page, signing a petition, or sharing a meme, on this view, provides the psychological satisfaction of having done something — without requiring the time, risk, or social capital of genuine political involvement.

Gladwell (2010), writing in The New Yorker, argued that social media enables the "weak ties" that are insufficient for high-risk activism, contrasting online organizing with the sit-in movement of the 1960s. But subsequent research has complicated this binary considerably. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) introduced "connective action" to describe how digital platforms enable protest coordination without traditional organizational hierarchies — citing Occupy Wall Street and the Indignados as examples. In connective action, personalized content shared across digital networks replaces the strong organizational identities characteristic of collective action.

Halupka (2014) offers a useful typology that distinguishes between "thin" participation (liking, sharing, following), "medium" participation (commenting, creating content, signing petitions), and "thick" participation (organizing, donating, protesting, joining organizations). Crucially, Halupka acknowledges that thin participation can serve as a gateway to thicker forms, especially for first-time participants. "The crucial question," Halupka writes, "is not whether online participation is 'real' participation, but rather how it relates to other forms and what conditions facilitate movement along the thin-thick continuum" (p. 15).

The CJP's successful transition to offline protest offers empirical evidence for exactly this gateway function. Between May 16 and June 6, 2026, the movement progressed from thin participation (following, liking) through medium participation (commenting, sharing, registering via form) to thick participation (organizing, protesting). This trajectory suggests that under specific conditions — clear political demands, organizing infrastructure, leadership willing to accept legal risk, and a concrete target — online movements can indeed produce offline mobilization.

This is consistent with a broader empirical literature that has moved beyond the binary slacktivism debate to ask, directly, whether social media use predicts offline political participation. Boulianne's (2015) meta-analysis of 36 studies found that more than 80 percent of reported coefficients between social media use and civic or political participation were positive, though only about half reached statistical significance and the relationship was weaker in panel studies than in cross-sectional surveys — a caution against over-reading correlational findings as proof of causation. A subsequent meta-analysis focused specifically on young people, Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), similarly concluded that digital media use is associated with higher, not lower, offline civic and political engagement among youth, challenging displacement accounts in which time spent online substitutes for time spent on offline activism. At the level of individual protest events, Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman (2012) found that Facebook use predicted participation in Chile's 2011 student protests even after controlling for grievances, resources, and traditional news use, and identified opinion

expression and exposure to mobilizing information as the mechanisms linking use to turnout. Read together, this literature suggests that the CJP's progression from thin to thick participation is not an idiosyncratic outlier but an instance of a more general, if modest and unevenly demonstrated, pattern: social media use tends to complement rather than crowd out offline political action, particularly when — as with the CJP's Google Form registrations and protest logistics posted to Instagram — the platform itself carries mobilizing information.

### 2.5 Connective Action and Organizational Infrastructure

Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) concept of connective action is particularly relevant to the CJP's organizational model. They distinguish between collective action — organized through hierarchical institutions with formal membership and strong organizational identities — and connective action, organized through digital networks, with personalized content sharing and loose affiliation. Connective action relies on "personal action frames": individually generated but collectively distributed narratives that require no central coordination.

The CJP is a near-perfect illustration. It has no formal membership structure beyond a Google Form, no regional chapters, no party constitution, no campaign offices. Yet it coordinated a national protest within weeks of its founding. The movement's content is highly personalized — memes that users can share, adapt, riff on — yet distributed collectively across millions of accounts.

But the CJP also reveals limits of purely connective action. Digital networks enable rapid scaling; they struggle with sustained coordination and strategic decision-making. The June 6 protest required Dipke's physical presence in Delhi — he flew from Boston specifically to lead it. Even distributed movements, it seems, benefit from centralized leadership for high-stakes actions. The movement also has no formal mechanism for resolving disagreements, no collective decision-making process beyond Dipke's personal authority, and no clear governance structure should it grow beyond his capacity to manage.

The CJP's emergent leadership structure — including spokesperson Saurav Das, education policy spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka, and allied activist Sonam Wangchuk — suggests one possible hybrid form (ABP Live, 2026;Mid-day, 2026). Future research should examine these hybrid models that combine connective action's scalability and low barriers with collective action's organizational durability.

### 2.6 The Networked Public Sphere and Its Pathologies

Jürgen Habermas's (1989) concept of the public sphere — a space where private citizens gather to deliberate about matters of common concern — has been extensively revised for the digital age. Benkler (2006) proposed the "networked public sphere" to describe how digital platforms let citizens bypass traditional media gatekeepers and engage directly in political discourse. Unlike Habermas's bourgeois public sphere, the networked public sphere allows many-to-many communication, decentralized production, and emergent deliberation without editorial control.

Benkler identifies three key features. First, low communication costs reduce barriers to entry, enabling marginalized voices to participate. Second, the diversity of sources and perspectives increases, challenging the dominance of mainstream media frames. Third, the network's architecture facilitates "peer production" — collaborative content creation without hierarchy.

The networked public sphere is not, however, without its pathologies. Sunstein (2017) has documented how digital platforms enable echo chambers and information cascades that intensify polarization rather than foster deliberation. Zuckerman (2013) observes that

participation in the networked public sphere is uneven, often mirroring and amplifying offline inequalities.

The CJP's content operates within a broadly anti-BJP, urban liberal ideological community. Content analysis found that 43 of 56 initial posts (76.8 percent) contained explicit or implicit out-group derogation targeting "godimedia" (BJP-aligned news outlets), the judiciary, the BJP, or "the system" generally. While this generates in-group solidarity, it may also reinforce echo chamber dynamics. The relationship between echo chambers and mobilization is complex: polarization may reduce deliberative quality while increasing action readiness — and the CJP's offline protest suggests that online communities organized around shared grievances can produce real collective action.

### 2.7 Caste, Class, and the Digital Divide

A significant gap in the digital participation literature is the relative neglect of caste as an organizing variable in Indian political life. Caste structures access to education, employment, and digital infrastructure. The "youth unemployment" the CJP mobilizes around is not a universal condition: Dalit and Adivasi youth face systematically higher unemployment rates and lower returns to education than their upper-caste and OBC peers (Deshpande, 2011;Thorat & Newman, 2010).

The digital divide in India is, in substantial part, a caste divide. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (2025), internet access stands at 68 percent for upper-caste urban households, 41 percent for OBC urban households, and 23 percent for Scheduled Caste urban households — with rural access significantly lower across all categories. English proficiency, necessary for full participation in CJP's primarily English-language content, is even more skewed: approximately 72 percent of English speakers in India come from upper-caste backgrounds (Venkatraman, 2017).

The "cockroach" metaphor may also land differently across caste positions. For upper-caste youth, being called a cockroach is a novel insult — a violation of expected social respect. For Dalit youth, animal analogies and dehumanization are not novel but structural, part of a long history of caste-based humiliation. One X user articulated this plainly during the study period: "Upper-caste people are shocked to be called cockroaches. Dalits have been called worse their whole lives. This movement doesn't speak for us" (X post, May 20, 2026). This voice represents a minority of the dataset, but it points to how treating "youth" as a unified category can obscure profoundly differentiated experiences of exclusion.

The CJP's participant base almost certainly skews urban, educated, and upper-caste. Dipke's own background — a master's degree from Boston University, prior work with the Delhi government — places him within this privileged stratum. The June 6 protest offered some evidence of broader participation, with "a mix of school and college students, and young professionals" present (Mid-day, 2026), but systematic data on caste and class backgrounds remain unavailable. This is a significant limitation of the present study and of the broader literature on Indian digital politics.

### 2.8 Identity Formation and Memetic Affiliation

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offers a complementary lens for understanding how meme-based satire generates political affiliation. Tajfel and Turner proposed that social identity formation involves three sequential processes: social categorization (defining the self as a group member), social identification (adopting the group's norms and values), and social comparison (evaluating the in-group favorably against out-groups). The CJP's "Main Bhi Cockroach" (I too am a cockroach) phenomenon moves through all three.

Categorization occurred when Justice Kant's remarks labeled unemployed youth as cockroaches. Intended as stigmatization, this labeling paradoxically supplied a ready-made category for collective identification. Identification occurred through memetic participation: by sharing, following, and engaging with CJP content, users adopted the cockroach identity and its associated norms — resilience, persistence, irreverence toward authority. Comparison occurred through explicit and implicit contrasts between the cockroach in-group (frustrated, unemployed, silenced) and various out-groups (the judiciary, mainstream political parties, "godimedia").

This process is not unique to the CJP. Milner (2016) analysed the Pepe the Frog phenomenon and found that the meme's transformation from benign cartoon character to politically charged symbol occurred through precisely this identity-affirmation mechanism. Phillips (2015) similarly documented how ironic participation in trolling communities can slide into genuine ideological commitment. The CJP differs primarily in its explicit political orientation and its successful translation of online identity formation into offline collective action.

### 2.9 Synthesis: An Integrative Theoretical Framework

This study integrates the theoretical perspectives reviewed above into a coherent framework for analysing meme-based political participation, while remaining attentive to the limitations of Western-centric theory and the specific conditions of the Indian context. The framework proposes that meme-based satire encourages political participation through six interconnected mechanisms.

First, barrier reduction (from participatory culture theory) enables participation by lowering the temporal, financial, and psychological costs of political expression. Following, sharing, and liking take seconds rather than hours.

Second, cover provision (from political satire theory) reduces perceived risks by enabling plausible deniability. Participants can claim "it was just a joke" if challenged — though this cover may come at the cost of political legibility, a tension that becomes acute when movements transition offline.

Third, identity formation (from social identity theory) transforms individual frustration into collective affiliation. The "Main Bhi Cockroach" frame converts stigmatization into solidarity, providing the emotional foundation for sustained engagement.

Fourth, network amplification (from networked public sphere theory) enables decentralized scaling. Each participant becomes a distribution node, propagating content without centralized coordination.

Fifth, catharsis generation (from affect theory) provides emotional rewards that sustain engagement. Sharing anger, frustration, and humour with like-minded others produces psychological benefits that reinforce continued participation and may motivate escalation to higher-risk actions.

Sixth, issue concretization (emerging from the CJP case itself) involves translating diffuse grievances into specific, actionable political demands. The CJP's focus on Education Minister Pradhan's resignation over NEET exam paper leaks transformed abstract frustration with "the system" into a concrete target with a clear timeline, enabling protest coordination.

This framework guides the empirical analysis in subsequent sections, organizing findings around these six mechanisms while remaining open to themes that emerge from the data.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to examine the Cockroach Janta Party as an instance of meme-based political participation, with longitudinal follow-up through June 7, 2026. Case study methodology is appropriate when research questions ask how and why, when investigators have limited control over events, and when the focus is a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2018, p. 14). The CJP phenomenon meets all three criteria.

### 3.2 Case Selection

The Cockroach Janta Party was selected as an instrumental case (Stake, 1995) — chosen to illuminate a broader phenomenon rather than for its intrinsic interest. Selection criteria included: (1) an extraordinary growth trajectory, exceeding 22 million followers within three weeks; (2) explicit positioning as a meme-based political movement; (3) emergence from a well-documented trigger event (Justice Kant's remarks); (4) national visibility with extensive media coverage enabling data triangulation; (5) a clear generational focus on Gen Z participants; and (6) a successful transition to offline protest, providing crucial evidence about the conversion of online engagement to offline action.

Comparison cases were considered and set aside. Other Indian political meme accounts — The Logical Indian, Faking News, various regional satire pages — have significant followings but lack the CJP's explicit political mobilization frame. International meme-based movements — Brazil's "Funcionários do Fantástico" and Thailand's "Bad Student" movement — offer comparative insights but differ too much in political context and meme form. Focusing on the CJP as a single case enables the depth of analysis that would be impossible with multiple cases, given how recently the phenomenon emerged.

### 3.3 Data Sources

Data were collected from six primary sources between May 16 and June 7, 2026.

Source 1: Instagram Content Archive. The CJP's Instagram account published 78 posts during the study period — 56 in the initial wave through May 25, and 22 additional posts through June 7. Each post was captured via screenshot and systematically archived, including image content, caption text, hashtags, engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments), and publication timestamp.

Source 2: Membership Registration Data. The CJP's Google Form membership registration, publicly accessible via a link posted on Instagram, provided aggregate data on signup volume, reported as 350,000 registrations by May 21, 2026. Individual responses were not accessed for privacy reasons.

Source 3: News Media Coverage. Twenty Indian and international outlets covered the CJP phenomenon during the study period, including Hindustan Times, Al Jazeera, ABP Live, ET Now, Outlook India, The CSR Journal, PTC News, India Today, The Quint, News18, ThePrint, The Wire, Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, Bloomberg, ABC News, Mid-day, The Times of India, The Straits Times, and ARY News. Coverage included follower tracking, interviews with Dipke, expert commentary, user reactions, and protest reporting.

Source 4: X (Twitter) Discourse Analysis. The hashtags #CockroachJantaParty, #MainBhiCockroach, and #CockroachRevolution were monitored throughout the study period. A sample of 750 posts was captured for thematic analysis, including content related to account blocking and the creation of alternative accounts.

Source 5: Comment Section Analysis. Comment sections from CJP's 25 most-engaged Instagram posts were analysed, yielding approximately 3,000 individual comments. These were anonymized and coded for theme, sentiment, and participation type.

Source 6: Protest Observation Data. Secondary analysis of news coverage, photographs, and video footage from the June 6 protest at Jantar Mantar included estimates of crowd size (hundreds), participant demographics (a mix of students and young professionals, with some parents present), stated demands (Pradhan's resignation), protest tactics (cockroach masks, flowers for police, copies of the Constitution), and outcomes (peaceful conclusion, six detentions, no mass arrests).

### 3.4 Analytical Approach

Analysis proceeded through four phases corresponding to the research questions.

Phase 1: Content Analysis of Instagram Posts. The 78 CJP Instagram posts were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An initial coding scheme was developed deductively from the theoretical framework, coding for: satirical target (judiciary, mainstream media, political parties, government policies), humour type (absurdist, ironic, parodic, hyperbolic), call to participation (explicit, implicit, none), emotional register (angry, humorous, frustrated, defiant), and visual style (meme template, original graphic, screenshot, video). Two coders independently coded 20 percent of posts to establish inter-coder reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.84$); the lead author then coded the remainder.

Phase 2: Thematic Analysis of Engagement Patterns. Comment sections and X posts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following the six-phase procedure of familiarization, initial coding, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and write-up. Themes were identified inductively, allowing patterns to emerge from the data rather than being imposed in advance. Six dominant themes emerged: (1) identity reclamation, (2) affective expression, (3) collective action framing, (4) out-group derogation, (5) political efficacy expression, and (6) conversion questions.

Phase 3: Protest Event Analysis. News coverage of the June 6 protest was analysed using event analysis methodology (della Porta, 2014), focusing on framing, participation, repression, outcomes, and the relationship between online mobilization and offline action.

Phase 4: Engagement Metrics Analysis. Quantitative metrics were compiled from multiple news sources to triangulate growth patterns. Growth trajectories were mapped against key events (Justice Kant's remarks, CJP's founding, Dipke's return to India, the June 6 protest) to identify temporal relationships.

### 3.5 Attention to Counter-Discourse

The analysis deliberately sought out critical voices — users who questioned the CJP's legitimacy, raised concerns about meme-based activism, or simply disagreed. Approximately 8 percent of coded comments ($n \approx 240$) expressed skepticism or criticism. These perspectives are integrated throughout the findings. Government responses — including Minister Rijiju's accusations of Pakistani followers — and media skepticism are also analysed as part of the movement's constrained environment.

### 3.6 Caste and Class Limitations

The study's data do not permit direct analysis of participants' caste backgrounds. The discussion section addresses how caste and class likely mediate CJP participation, drawing on secondary literature about digital divides in India, but this remains a significant gap.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical guidelines for social media research (boyd & Crawford, 2012;Zimmer, 2010). All user comments analysed were publicly available with no privacy restrictions. Identifying information — usernames, profile pictures — was removed during analysis and is not reproduced here. The CJP account is a public figure account, and Dipke has spoken extensively with journalists, mitigating privacy concerns. No data were collected from private accounts or groups.

### 3.8 Limitations

This study faces several significant limitations.

First, data access and metric reliability. The study relies on publicly available data and media-reported figures rather than direct access to platform analytics. Follower counts may include bot accounts or purchased followers, though engagement rates averaging 4.2 percent across posts are consistent with authentic accounts. Reported figures should be treated as upper-bound estimates.

Second, temporal scope. The study extends only through June 7, 2026 — roughly three weeks. Longitudinal analysis of sustained participation, follower retention, and movement evolution requires further follow-up.

Third, causality and conversion. The study cannot definitively establish causal relationships between online engagement and protest participation. It is unknown what proportion of online followers were aware of the protest, or what share of those aware chose to attend. The hundreds of protesters relative to 22 million followers suggests a low conversion rate of around 0.001 percent, though this may understate impact.

Fourth, language and regional bias. The analysis is limited to English-language content and sources, potentially missing substantial participation occurring in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, or other Indian languages.

Fifth, generalizability. As a single case, findings may not generalize to other contexts. However, as Yin (2018) argues, case studies aim for analytical generalization to theory rather than statistical generalization to populations.

Sixth, researcher positionality. The lead researcher is not Indian and does not speak any Indian language beyond basic Hindi phrases. Triangulation with Indian sources and reliance on emic categories from participant discourse partially addresses this, but interpretation of culturally specific humour and political references remains constrained.

Seventh, caste and class data. The study cannot directly analyse caste dynamics. This is a significant gap: caste is arguably the most important structural variable in Indian political sociology. The discussion addresses this extensively, but future research with appropriate data is urgently needed.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Identity Reclamation: From Stigma to Solidarity

The most striking finding concerns how the CJP transformed a judicial insult into a badge of collective identity. This process- which we call "appropriative irony" - involved embracing the stigmatizing label not in spite of its negativity but because of it: weaponizing the insult against its source while converting shame into solidarity.

Content analysis of the 78 Instagram posts found that identity reclamation frames appeared in 67 posts (85.9 percent). These took three main forms. Direct reclamation (38 posts, 48.7 percent) explicitly used "cockroach" as a self-identifier, as in "proud cockroach" or "Main Bhi Cockroach." Comparative reclamation (20 posts, 25.6 percent) contrasted cockroach resilience with institutional fragility — "Cockroaches survived the dinosaurs; they'll survive you too."

Inversion reclamation (9 posts, 11.5 percent) reframed negative cockroach associations positively — "They say we're pests? We say we're persistent."

Thematic analysis of the 3,000 comments and 750 X posts revealed extensive identity reclamation discourse. Illustrative examples include:

- "I've been called unemployed, lazy, a burden on society. First time someone's called me a cockroach and I felt seen" (Instagram comment, May 17, 2026)
- "Main bhi cockroach and proud. At least cockroaches survive when the system collapses" (X post, May 18, 2026)
- "Cockroach Janta Party understands me better than any real party ever has" (Instagram comment, May 19, 2026)
- "I have a job, but I'm still a cockroach. Because I'm tired of being ignored, talked down to, and told my problems don't matter" (X post, May 19, 2026)

Notably, the identity reclamation extended beyond the directly unemployed to encompass a broader sense of political disenfranchisement. "Cockroach" functioned as a floating signifier for anyone who felt excluded from India's political and economic systems, regardless of their employment status. At the June 6 protest, this identity was physically enacted: participants wore cockroach masks distributed at the venue, giving the verbal metaphor a literal, visible form (Mid-day, 2026). Aditi Mishra, president of the JNU Students' Union, articulated the resonance plainly at the protest: "[Government officials] really stomp on us and move on" (ABC News, 2026).

This process maps directly onto Tajfel and Turner's (1979) three stages. Categorization occurred when Justice Kant's remarks labeled unemployed youth as cockroaches. Identification occurred when users voluntarily adopted that label and its associated norms — resilience, persistence, irreverence. Comparison occurred through explicit contrasts between the cockroach in-group and various out-groups: the judiciary, mainstream political parties, and "godimedia."

### 4.2 Humour as Political Resistance: From Cover to Commitment

The CJP's content strategy relies heavily on what engagement analysis describes as "absurdist humour, exaggerated political rhetoric, and Gen-Z irony" (ET Now, 2026, para. 4). This is not incidental to the movement's political function — it is central to it. In contexts where direct political criticism carries genuine risks, satire provides essential cover.

Content analysis identified three dominant humour types. Absurdist humour (43 posts, 55.1 percent) involved exaggerated scenarios and impossible juxtapositions — for example, a photoshopped image of cockroaches in lawyers' wigs crawling across the Supreme Court bench. Ironic understatement (19 posts, 24.4 percent) involved saying the opposite of what was meant for rhetorical effect: "We're sure the Chief Justice meant well when he compared millions of unemployed youth to vermin" (CJP Instagram, May 17, 2026). Parodic imitation (16 posts, 20.5 percent) mimicked the form of official communications, including a mock judicial order "sentencing" the Chief Justice to spend a day looking for employment in the current job market.

The CJP's manifesto, posted May 16, 2026, illustrates how humour enables substantive critique. Among its demands:

- No post-retirement Rajya Sabha seats for Chief Justices
- Strict action against deletion of valid votes in any election
- Electoral bans for defecting legislators within six months before elections
- Action against misinformation by media outlets
- Exam reforms including transparency around paper leaks and cancellation penalties
- Job creation targets with consequences for non-compliance

Presented with ironic framing — including headings like "Very Serious Demands (Please Don't Arrest Us)" and a disclaimer that the party was "for entertainment purposes only" — these demands are no less substantive than those of conventional opposition parties. The satirical packaging attracts engagement from users who would scroll past a policy document, reduces the perceived risk of endorsing "radical" positions, and allows supporters to signal political alignment without formal commitment.

The protective function of satire was visible throughout the comment data. Users frequently prefaced political criticism with framing statements like "Just joking but..." or "Cockroach speaking (don't take seriously)..." This discursive move enables participation while maintaining deniability.

A tension emerged, however, between cover and clarity. While many participants valued satire's protection, others grew frustrated with its ambiguity. One X user wrote: "I love CJP but sometimes I can't tell if we're actually organizing or just joking. The 'it's just a meme' cover protects us but also makes us less serious" (X post, May 20, 2026). Another offered a different reading: "The genius of CJP is that it says what everyone is thinking but can't say. Call it a joke. We'll call it the truth dressed as a joke so the police don't come knocking" (X post, May 19, 2026).

At the June 6 protest, participants shed the protective ambiguity of ironic distance and assumed visible, identifiable risk. Dipke acknowledged this before his return: "My friends and family fear that I will be arrested directly at the airport and then sent to prison. But I hope that our country is still a democracy" (Times of India, 2026). On arrival, he carried a copy of B.R. Ambedkar's autobiography — a gesture invoking constitutional protection (ABC News, 2026). Organizers took deliberate precautions: they asked participants to bring flowers for police and to bring their parents, maintaining the movement's characteristic ironic tone even in physical protest (ABC News, 2026). Six people were detained, but no mass arrests occurred (Mid-day, 2026).

### 4.3 The Participation Continuum: From Following to Protesting

The CJP dramatically lowered barriers to political engagement, creating a ladder from passive consumption to active organizing. Content analysis found that 72 of 78 Instagram posts (92.3 percent) contained some form of call to participation.

Applying Halupka's (2014) typology: thin participation — following, liking — characterised the vast majority of the 22 million accounts. Medium participation — commenting, sharing, form registration — characterised a smaller subset, likely in the hundreds of thousands based on engagement rates. Thick participation — organizing, protesting — characterised hundreds.

The Google Form membership registration received over 350,000 submissions within 72 hours of launch (Outlook India, 2026). This represents a meaningful intermediate step between following and protesting, an entry point into medium participation that likely built the social infrastructure for subsequent offline action. The June 6 protest, while modest in absolute numbers, suggests that a small but meaningful fraction of online followers can be mobilized under the right conditions.

The protest's size — hundreds, not thousands or tens of thousands — should not obscure its significance. For a movement that had existed only as a joke three weeks earlier, the ability to bring even hundreds of people into the streets was a real achievement. The protest's peaceful nature, extensive media coverage, and clear articulation of demands reflected genuine organizing capacity, not simply viral momentum.

Critical voices pushed back. One X user wrote: "CJP is fun. I follow it. But let's not pretend liking memes is the same as building a movement. When the next election comes, the

cockroaches will still have no candidates" (X post, May 21, 2026). Another commented: "Hundreds out of 22 million? That's not a movement, that's a rounding error" (Instagram comment, June 6, 2026). These voices highlight ongoing questions about the conversion problem that this paper cannot fully resolve.

### 4.4 Issue Concretization: From Diffuse Grievance to Specific Demand

The CJP's evolution from general anti-establishment satire to a specific demand for Education Minister Pradhan's resignation exemplifies the mechanism of issue concretization. Abstract frustration with "the system" — unemployment, inflation, lack of opportunity — found a concrete target in the NEET exam leak scandal.

In May 2026, authorities cancelled India's largest medical entrance exam, taken by more than 2.27 million aspirants, after evidence emerged that questions had been circulating early (Bloomberg, 2026). A separate controversy erupted when test managers released erroneous results for a widely used high school graduation exam. These scandals gave the CJP's diffuse anti-establishment sentiment a specific, actionable focus.

At the June 6 protest, organizers delivered a clear ultimatum: "We are giving the government seven days. Either Dharmendra Pradhan should resign respectfully, or Prime Minister Narendra Modi should sack him. If his resignation does not come within seven days, this movement will spread throughout the country" (Mid-day, 2026). This framing provided a concrete timeline, a specific target, and a clear escalation path — essential ingredients for coordinating collective action.

Content analysis of posts between May 25 and June 5 showed sharply increasing attention to examination scandals. Of 22 posts during this period, 15 (68.2 percent) mentioned NEET, Pradhan, or exam leaks directly, compared to none of the initial 56 posts. This shift demonstrates the movement's capacity to adapt its messaging to emerging political issues while maintaining its satirical frame.

### 4.5 Distributed Organizing and Emergent Leadership

The CJP was built by one person using AI tools in roughly 24 hours. It has no formal hierarchy beyond Dipke's self-designation as "Founding President," no regional offices, no party constitution, no membership dues, no paid staff. Yet within weeks, it achieved something no opposition party has managed in years: surpassing the BJP's Instagram following, generating national political discourse, and bringing protesters into the streets.

This is "infrastructure without hierarchy" — an organizational model that substitutes network effects for traditional resources. Each follower becomes a node in a distributed communication network, propagating content without being directed. The model scales rapidly, is resilient (when the X account was blocked, followers migrated to alternatives within hours), and is adaptive.

But it also has limits. The movement's ability to organize the June 6 protest required emergent leadership structures to develop beyond Dipke. Key figures have emerged: Saurav Das, an investigative journalist known for RTI activism, as spokesperson; Ashutosh Ranka, a former Delhi government consultant, as education policy voice; Sonam Wangchuk, the noted climate activist and educator, lending visibility and legitimacy at the protest (ABP Live, 2026;Mid-day, 2026). Dipke's own physical presence was also essential — he flew from Boston to lead the march.

This emergent leadership suggests the movement is developing organizing capacity beyond its founder. Whether that capacity can be sustained — and whether formal decision-making structures will develop — remains to be seen.

### 4.6 State Response: Suppression, Surveillance, and Tolerance

The Indian government's response has been multifaceted. The CJP's X handle was blocked in India, prompting the creation of a new account titled "Cockroach is Back," which rapidly gained nearly 150,000 followers, alongside multiple parody "branch" handles (AFP, 2026). Senior cabinet minister Kiren Rijiju accused the group of seeking followers from Pakistan and the "anti-India gang," a term the ruling BJP uses for those it sees as unpatriotic. Dipke has publicly shared data showing approximately 95 percent of Instagram followers are based in India (ARY News, 2026).

Police deployed a team of ten officers at Dipke's family home in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Maharashtra (Mid-day, 2026). Dipke reported his family had received threats (Times of India, 2026). Delhi Police granted permission for the Jantar Mantar protest while deploying over 1,000 personnel and detaining six individuals (Mid-day, 2026).

This pattern — account blocking, surveillance, accusations of foreign backing, but ultimately a permitted protest — describes a constrained public sphere in which the state tolerates dissent within limits while actively working to shape those limits. The CJP's strategic response — seeking police permission, asking participants to bring flowers for officers — appears calibrated to deny the government justification for violent repression and appeal to constitutional protections. Whether this strategy will remain effective as the movement grows remains an open question.

### 4.7 Counter-Discourse and Critical Voices

The analysis deliberately sought critical perspectives. Approximately 8 percent of coded comments expressed skepticism, including: questioning whether meme engagement substitutes for genuine action ("This is just slacktivism with extra steps"); accusing the CJP of trivializing serious issues ("Unemployment isn't a joke. People are suffering. Memes don't feed families"); concerns about co-optation ("Watch the BJP start a 'Cockroach Cell' tomorrow"); and skepticism about the protest's impact ("Hundreds out of 22 million? That's not a movement").

Government supporters dismissed the CJP as a "social-media gimmick" that might not translate into sustained political impact (AP, 2026). Some activists questioned whether meme-based movements can achieve structural change. These critical voices are not included here to dismiss the CJP's significance, but as essential correctives to uncritical celebration. The movement's achievements are real; its potential is real; neither is unlimited.

### 4.8 Limitations and Ambivalences of Meme Politics

Despite its extraordinary growth and successful protest, the CJP has significant limitations.

The most obvious is the conversion rate problem. The gap between 22 million online followers and hundreds of offline protesters represents a conversion rate of roughly 0.001 percent. While any offline mobilization from a three-week-old meme account is noteworthy, the gap between online enthusiasm and offline action is vast.

A second limitation concerns exclusion and cultural capital. The CJP's primarily English-language content, reliant on specific cultural references (Indian judicial procedures, media criticism, internet meme formats), may exclude Indians without access to the requisite education and language skills. The 22 million followers represent a fraction of India's 380 million youth, and likely a skewed one.

Third, internet memes are intrinsically ephemeral. The rapid attention cycle that enabled CJP's explosive growth could produce equally rapid collapse. Whether the movement can sustain engagement beyond its initial viral phase remains to be seen.

Fourth, the movement depends heavily on Dipke's personal leadership, creating a single point of failure. If Dipke is arrested, deterred, or simply burned out, there are currently no clear succession mechanisms.

Fifth, the CJP's explicitly anti-establishment positioning makes it a target for co-optation by political actors. Growth will likely bring pressure to endorse candidates or positions, potentially alienating supporters or being absorbed into the political system the movement set out to critique.

Sixth, and most fundamentally, the movement has successfully articulated grievances and mobilized protesters. Whether it can achieve structural change — Pradhan's resignation, examination reforms, reduced youth unemployment — is entirely unknown.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications: Extending Participatory Culture

The CJP case enriches and complicates Jenkins' (2006, 2009) theory of participatory culture in several ways. Jenkins developed his framework primarily through analysis of Western media fandoms in relatively permissive political environments. The CJP extends participatory culture theory to a context where political speech carries genuine risk and where the line between cultural and political expression is actively policed.

In such contexts, participatory culture acquires additional functions. First, it becomes cover-providing: the cultural framing of political action as entertainment reduces perceived risk. Second, it becomes catharsis-generating: sharing frustration with like-minded others produces psychological benefits that may be as important as instrumental political outcomes. Third, it becomes identity-affirming: where official political identities (party membership, formal activism) carry costs, informal memetic identities offer lower-risk affiliation. Fourth, it can become mobilization-ready: the collective identity and efficacy beliefs cultivated through online participation can, under specific conditions, translate into offline collective action.

These extensions suggest that participatory culture theory requires contextualization. In liberal democratic contexts, participatory culture primarily enables creative expression. In constrained contexts, it enables political resistance, community formation, and potentially offline mobilization. The functions, mechanisms, and consequences vary with political environment.

### 5.2 The Carnivalesque Online and Offline

The CJP case also extends political satire theory, particularly Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin emphasized the temporary, bounded nature of carnival: medieval carnival inverted hierarchy for a finite period, after which normal order resumed. The CJP raises the question of whether digital satire can escape this temporality. Unlike physical carnival, digital satire persists. Content remains accessible. Communities remain connected. Identities remain asserted.

This persistence creates the possibility that digital satire might achieve what physical carnival never could: sustained inversion rather than temporary suspension. The CJP's 22 million followers are not returning to normal political life unchanged. The June 6 protest suggests that sustained inversion can, under specific conditions, produce collective action in physical public spaces.

Yet the protest also maintained carnivalesque elements: cockroach masks, flowers for police, an ironic tone that distinguished this march from conventional protest scripts. Participants preserved their satirical identity while assuming serious political functions — a hybrid form that is perhaps the CJP's most distinctive contribution to the political communication repertoire.

### 5.3 From Memes to Mobilization: Conditions for Conversion

The CJP's successful transition from online engagement to offline protest provides crucial evidence for debates about digital activism's efficacy. Critics have long argued that online engagement substitutes for offline action (Morozov, 2011;Gladwell, 2010). Yet, as discussed in Section 2.4, the cross-national meta-analytic evidence generally points the other way, toward a modest positive association between social media use and offline participation (Boulianne, 2015;Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2012). The CJP case complicates the substitution claim in two ways.

First, for most participants, the choice is not between online and offline activism but between online engagement and political disengagement entirely. The hundreds who protested are a subset of the millions who followed — but they are not zero. The CJP generated offline action where previously there was none.

Second, the CJP's protest was qualitatively different from traditional protest organizing. It was coordinated through social media, required no formal organizational membership, and emerged organically from shared grievances. This suggests that connective action can produce collective action — at lower participation rates than traditional organizations, but it can.

The case suggests several conditions that enable the transition from online engagement to offline protest. Issue concretization: diffuse grievances must be translated into specific demands with identifiable targets and clear timelines. Visible leadership: participants need to know who is organizing and that organizers are willing to accept legal risk. Low-barrier pathways: the transition is facilitated by intermediate participation options, like the Google Form that received 350,000+ registrations. Perceived efficacy: participants must believe protest might produce change. State tolerance: offline protest requires that the state permit mobilization, or that participants are prepared to accept repression. Peer recruitment: social networks facilitate participation.

These conditions are not exclusive to the CJP and may characterize successful meme-to-mobilization transitions more broadly. Future comparative research should test this framework across cases.

### 5.4 Caste, Class, and the Digital Divide

The absence of caste from most digital participation scholarship is a gap that this paper cannot fully remedy, given data constraints, but cannot ignore. As discussed in Sections 2.7 and 4.1, the digital divide in India is substantially a caste divide. The CJP's participant base almost certainly skews urban, educated, and upper-caste. This means the movement's claimed universality — "youth" as a unified constituency — obscures profound differentials in who can access, participate in, and benefit from digital political organizing.

The seven-day ultimatum delivered at the Jantar Mantar protest will test whether meme politics can produce tangible policy outcomes for the full range of Indian youth, or only for those already advantaged enough to participate. Future research must prioritize caste analysis using appropriate data collection methods.

### 5.5 Echo Chambers, Polarization, and Mobilization

The CJP's content is highly partisan: 76.8 percent of initial posts contained explicit out-group derogation. This raises legitimate concerns about echo chambers and political polarization (Sunstein, 2017). But the relationship between polarization and mobilization is complex. Deliberative democracies may value exposure to diverse viewpoints; social movements often require strong in-group/out-group differentiation to motivate collective action.

The CJP's out-group framing serves a mobilizational function. Identifying a common enemy — the judiciary, the BJP, "godimedia" — transforms individual grievances into collective action frames. Shared anger at out-groups provides emotional energy for sustained engagement. Whether the movement can maintain this energy while building broader coalitions and negotiating with state actors is an open question that its future trajectory will answer.

### 5.6 Practical Implications for Political Organizing

Political organizers across the ideological spectrum should pay attention to the CJP case. The BJP's sophisticated digital operation, built over years at significant cost, was outpaced in weeks by a solo operator with AI tools. In the attention economy, agility and authenticity may matter more than infrastructure and budget. For parties and movements seeking to engage young people, the CJP offers several lessons.

Lower barriers dramatically. Political participation has traditionally required substantial commitment. The CJP demonstrates that lower barriers can produce massive participation when aggregated across millions of users. Thin participation should not be the endpoint of organizing strategy, but it is an effective entry point.

Embrace authentic voice. The CJP resonates because it feels like something made by a peer rather than a party, using Gen Z communication norms rather than political boilerplate. Attempts by established parties to replicate this authenticity often fail — young people detect inauthenticity immediately.

Use satire strategically. Satire enables expression that direct criticism would foreclose. But organizers must be prepared to transition from satirical cover to committed action when mobilizing offline.

Concretize issues. Diffuse grievances generate online engagement but cannot coordinate collective action. Specific, actionable demands with identifiable targets and clear timelines enable protest coordination.

Plan for conversion. Building a massive online following is valuable only if it connects to offline power. Participation architectures should progressively escalate engagement from following to sharing to commenting to registering to organizing to protesting.

Develop leadership infrastructure. Even distributed movements benefit from visible leadership for high-stakes actions. The CJP's emergent leadership structure provides one model for balancing connective action's scalability with collective action's coordination capacity.

### 5.7 The Democratization of Political Communication: Promise and Peril

The CJP exemplifies a broader transformation: the democratization of political communication. Where political speech once required access to broadcast media or substantial resources, today anyone with a smartphone can potentially reach millions. This represents genuine democratization: the power to communicate is no longer concentrated in media conglomerates and political parties.

But democratization is not evenly distributed. The digital divide remains substantial; access skews urban, male, educated, and upper-caste. The CJP's 22 million followers are numerically impressive but represent a fraction of India's 380 million youth and a tiny fraction of the total population. Meme politics may democratize political communication for those already advantaged — while leaving the rest largely untouched.

Moreover, the algorithmic infrastructures that enable viral growth also shape which content spreads. Instagram's algorithms favor engagement: content that generates likes, shares, comments, and time-on-platform spreads further. This incentivizes emotional content, out-group derogation, and simplification. The CJP's content reflects these incentives, raising

questions about whether participation enabled by commercial platforms can ever be fully democratic — or whether it is always shaped by corporate interests as well as political ones.

### 5.8 Directions for Future Research

This study opens several research avenues. Longitudinal tracking of the CJP phenomenon should assess follower retention, engagement decay, further offline mobilization, and movement evolution over time. Panel studies could assess whether meme-based participation leads to sustained political engagement.

Comparative case studies across countries — Brazil, Thailand, Philippines, United States — could identify contextual factors that enable or constrain meme-based political movements. Future research should also examine vernacular meme politics in Indian languages beyond English, which may reach very different caste and class constituencies with different content, form, and mobilizing potential.

The conditions that enable online engagement to convert to offline action require empirical testing across cases. Platform effects — how Instagram, X, and other platforms differently shape participation through their specific affordances and algorithms — deserve systematic investigation. Most urgently, future research must prioritize caste analysis in digital political participation, developing methodological innovations that can capture the dynamics that data constraints prevented this study from addressing directly.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has examined how meme-based satire encourages political participation among Gen Z users, using the Cockroach Janta Party as an instrumental case study, with analysis running through the movement's first offline protest on June 6, 2026.

The findings demonstrate that meme politics works through several interconnected mechanisms. Identity reclamation transforms stigmatizing labels into badges of solidarity, converting individual shame into collective pride. Humour functions as political resistance, providing cover for criticism that direct speech would foreclose — though that cover generates a tension with political legibility that becomes acute when movements move offline. Low barriers to participation enable massive scaling, converting passive frustration into active expression across a continuum from thin to thick participation. Issue concretization translates diffuse grievances into specific, actionable demands with identifiable targets and clear timelines. Distributed organizing substitutes network effects for traditional organizational infrastructure — though emergent leadership structures proved necessary when it came to coordinating physical protest. And psychological rewards — efficacy, validation, community belonging — sustain engagement beyond the initial viral moment.

The CJP's successful transition to offline protest on June 6, 2026, provides crucial evidence that meme-based movements can overcome the conversion problem that has long troubled analyses of digital activism. The conditions appear to include: issue concretization, visible leadership willing to accept legal risk, low-barrier intermediate pathways, perceived efficacy, state tolerance, and peer recruitment. The conversion rate — hundreds of protesters from 22 million followers — is low, but for a movement that had not existed three weeks earlier, even hundreds of people in the streets is a meaningful achievement.

The CJP phenomenon reveals that for India's Gen Z, political participation has been fundamentally redefined. It is no longer primarily about party membership, voting, or traditional protesting — though these remain important. It now encompasses following, sharing, creating, identifying, belonging, and protesting: actions that might have seemed trivial to previous generations but constitute meaningful political expression in the digital age. The

question is not whether these are "real" participation but what they make possible and what they foreclose.

The movement's future remains uncertain. The seven-day ultimatum delivered at Jantar Mantar will test whether meme politics can produce tangible policy outcomes. The government's response will shape the movement's trajectory. The movement's ability to develop organizing infrastructure beyond Dipke's leadership, diversify its participant base across caste and class lines, and sustain engagement beyond its initial viral phase will determine whether the CJP is a fleeting internet trend or the beginning of a durable new political formation.

Regardless of longevity, the movement has already demonstrated something important. When a Chief Justice dismissed unemployed youth as cockroaches, over 22 millions of them responded — not primarily with marches or petitions, but with memes. And then, within weeks, with protest. The cockroaches have crawled out of the shadows and into the streets. They have proven they can organize, mobilize, and demand accountability. Whether they can achieve structural change remains to be seen. But they have already transformed how political communication works in India: demonstrating that a joke can become a protest, a meme can become a movement, and a stigmatized identity can become the foundation for collective action.

**Conflict of Interests**
None

**Funding**
None

**Acknowledgments**
None

**References**

[1] ABP Live. (2026, May 20). Cockroach Janta Party surpasses BJP on Instagram, crosses 9 million followers in four days. ABP Live.
[2] Agence France-Presse. (2026, June 2). India seeks to suppress 'Cockroach' youth party. New Age BD.
[3] Al Jazeera. (2026, May 20). 'Cockroach Janta Party': Top Indian judge's comment sparks satire, protest. Al Jazeera.
[4] Associated Press. (2026, June 5). Mock political party for India's young 'cockroaches' set to hold first protest in New Delhi. AP News.
[5] Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2026, June 7). India's viral 'cockroach' political movement spills onto Delhi's roads. ABC News.
[6] Bakhtin, M. (1984). Rabelais and his world (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Indiana University Press. (Original work published 1965)
[7] Baym, G. (2005). The Daily Show: Discursive integration and the reinvention of political journalism. Political Communication, 22(3), 259-276.
[8] Benkler, Y. (2006). The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom. Yale University Press.
[9] Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. Information, Communication & Society, 15(5), 739-768.
[10] Bloomberg. (2026, June 4). Viral 'Cockroach' movement leader heads to India to lead Gen-Z protests. The Straits Times.

[11] Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. Information, Communication & Society, 18(5), 524-538.
[12] Boulianne, S., & Theocharis, Y. (2020). Young people, digital media, and engagement: A meta-analysis of research. Social Science Computer Review, 38(2), 111-127.
[13] boyd, d., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. Information, Communication & Society, 15(5), 662-679.
[14] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.
[15] Carpentier, N. (2011). Media and participation: A site of ideological-democratic struggle. Intellect Books.
[16] Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. (2026). Unemployment statistics: Graduate unemployment report. CMIE.
[17] della Porta, D. (2014). Methodological practices in social movement research. Oxford University Press.
[18] Deshpande, A. (2011). The grammar of caste: Economic discrimination in contemporary India. Oxford University Press.
[19] ET Now. (2026, May 20). Cockroach Janta Party: India's fastest Instagram account! From courtroom slur to 10 Mn followers. ET Now.
[20] Gladwell, M. (2010, October 4). Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted. The New Yorker.
[21] Gray, J., Jones, J. P., & Thompson, E. (2009). Satire TV: Politics and comedy in the post-network era. NYU Press.
[22] Habermas, J. (1989). The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society (T. Burger, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)
[23] Halupka, D. (2014). Clicktivism: A systematic heuristic. Policy & Internet, 6(2), 115-132.
[24] Hindustan Times. (2026, May 20). Cockroach Janata Party >>> Bharatiya Janata Party. At least on Instagram. Hindustan Times.
[25] Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. Qualitative Health Research, 15(9), 1277-1288.
[26] Internet and Mobile Association of India. (2025). Internet in India 2025 report. IAMAI.
[27] Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide. NYU Press.
[28] Jenkins, H. (2009). Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century. MIT Press.
[29] Menon, N. (2012). Seeing like a feminist. Zubaan Books.
[30] Mid-day. (2026, June 7). Cockroach Janta Party holds first offline protest, seeks Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation. Mid-day.
[31] Milner, R. M. (2016). The world made meme: Public conversations and participatory media. MIT Press.
[32] Morozov, E. (2009, May 19). The brave new world of slacktivism. Foreign Policy.
[33] Morozov, E. (2011). The net delusion: The dark side of Internet freedom. PublicAffairs.
[34] Outlook India. (2026, May 20). How Cockroach Janta Party became more popular on Instagram than BJP. Outlook India.
[35] Phillips, W. (2015). This is why we can't have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture. MIT Press.
[36] PTI. (2026, May 19). Cockroach Janta Party's Instagram following crosses 7 million, founder says 'my phone has become a call centre'. Press Trust of India.

[37] Punathambekar, A. (2013). From Bombay to Bollywood: The making of a global media industry. NYU Press.
[38] Rajagopal, A. (2001). Politics after television: Hindu nationalism and the reshaping of the public in India. Cambridge University Press.
[39] Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. Sage Publications.
[40] Sunstein, C. R. (2017). #Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media. Princeton University Press.
[41] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), The social psychology of intergroup relations (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
[42] Thorat, S., & Newman, K. S. (2010). Blocked by caste: Economic discrimination in modern India. Oxford University Press.
[43] Times of India. (2026, June 1). 'I will most likely be arrested at the airport', says Cockroach Janta Party founder Abhijeet Dipke on return to India. The Times of India.
[44] United Nations Population Division. (2024). World population prospects 2024. United Nations.
[45] Valenzuela, S., Arriagada, A., & Scherman, A. (2012). The social media basis of youth protest behavior: The case of Chile. Journal of Communication, 62(2), 299-314.
[46] Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
[47] Zimmer, M. (2010). "But the data is already public": On the ethics of research in Facebook. Ethics and Information Technology, 12(4), 313-325.
[48] Zuckerman, E. (2013). Rewire: Digital cosmopolitans in the age of connection. W. W. Norton & Company.

***Appendix A: Timeline of Key Events (May-June 2026)***

| **Date** | **Event** |
|---|---|
| May 15, 2026 | Chief Justice Surya Kant makes "cockroach" remarks during court proceedings |
| May 16, 2026 | Abhijeet Dipke launches Cockroach Janta Party; Instagram account reaches 500,000 followers |
| May 17, 2026 | CJP reaches 1.8 million followers; manifesto posted |
| May 18, 2026 | CJP reaches 4.2 million followers; party anthem posted |
| May 19, 2026 | CJP reaches 7.5 million followers; Google Form registration launches |
| May 20, 2026 | CJP reaches 10.3 million followers; surpasses 10 million |
| May 21, 2026 | CJP reaches 12.1 million followers |
| May 22, 2026 | CJP reaches 14.2 million followers; surpasses BJP |
| June 1, 2026 | Dipke announces plan to return to India for protest |
| June 2, 2026 | CJP's X (Twitter) account blocked in India |
| June 5, 2026 | CJP Instagram reaches 22 million followers |
| June 6, 2026 | First offline protest at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi; seven-day ultimatum issued |

***Appendix B: Follower Growth Trajectory (May 16-June 5, 2026)***

| **Date** | **Approximate Followers (millions)** | **Cumulative Growth (millions)** | **Source** |
|---|---|---|---|
| May 16 | 0.5 | 0.5 | ABP Live |
| May 17 | 1.8 | 1.3 | ABP Live |
| May 18 | 4.2 | 2.4 | ET Now |
| May 19 | 7.5 | 3.3 | Outlook India |
| May 20 | 10.3 | 2.8 | ET Now |
| May 21 | 12.1 | 1.8 | Hindustan Times |
| May 22 | 14.2 | 2.1 | Outlook India |
| June 5 | 22.0 | 7.8 | AFP/AP |

*Note: Figures represent media-reported estimates. Instagram's documented issues with bot accounts and follower-buying services mean these figures should be interpreted as upper-bound estimates of potential reach. Engagement rate analysis (likes/followers) averaged 4.2 percent across posts, consistent with authentic accounts rather than bot-driven inflation, but this is suggestive rather than definitive.*

***Appendix C: Coding Scheme for Content Analysis***

| **Code Category** | **Code** | **Definition** | **Example** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Satirical Target | JUDICIARY | Content targeting Supreme Court, Chief Justice | "No post-retirement Rajya Sabha seats for judges" |
| Satirical Target | MEDIA | Content targeting news outlets | Reference to "godimedia" |
| Satirical Target | POLITICAL | Content targeting BJP, political parties | Mock BJP slogans |
| Satirical Target | POLICY | Content targeting government policies | Exam leak references |
| Humour Type | ABSURDIST | Exaggerated, impossible scenarios | Cockroaches in court |
| Humour Type | IRONIC | Saying opposite of meaning | "He meant well when he called us vermin" |
| Humour Type | PARODIC | Imitating official forms | Mock judicial order |
| Call to Action | EXPLICIT | Direct instruction | "Follow now" |
| Call to Action | IMPLICIT | Suggestion, modeling | "Don't you agree?" |
| Emotional Register | ANGRY | Direct expressions of anger | Profanity, accusations |
| Emotional Register | HUMOROUS | Joking, laughing | Absurdist scenarios |
| Emotional Register | DEFIANT | Resistance framing | "They said we don't matter" |

**How to Cite:** Paripoornam R., Khanna M., (2026). From Memes to Mobilisation: The Cockroach Janta Party as a Form of Digital Political Participation Among Indian Youth. International Journal of Education, Society and Policy, 1(2), 46-69. https://ijesp.org/index.php/ijesp/article/view/25