Intentional Internet shutdowns from the lens of gender, ethnicity and conflict

Major findings of the study “Of Sieges and Shutdowns”, July 2018, Manipur, India

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Study conducted by The Bachchao Project and IRDSO, Manipur in November 2017
Manipur
Research questions

1. What do women entrepreneurs and women activists located in Manipur use the mobile phone and the Internet for?
   1. What devices do they use to access the Internet? Who owns those devices? (Mobile devices such as smartphones, feature phones, basic mobile phones and tablets; mobile devices shared with one or more members of the family; other networked devices such as ethernet routers)

2. Over the past 40 years, that is, since 1977:
   i. How has their access to the Internet changed?
   ii. How has their access to mobile communication devices changed?

3. Is there a difference between usage of mobile devices that are Internet-enabled and those that are not?

4. Are there limitations or barriers to their access to the Internet and mobile networks?
   i. If yes, what are those limitations or barriers, as articulated by them?
   ii. What do they do to circumvent or overcome those barriers?

5. What are the software applications they use on their Internet-enabled devices?

Continued...
Research questions (continued)

2. Are there documented and verifiable instances of intentional shutdowns of the Internet or mobile networks or both in Manipur?
   - If yes, what was the nature of these shutdowns in terms of their time of occurrence, duration, scope, location within Manipur, type of Internet technology (*i.e.*, wireless Internet, wired broadband, mobile voice networks), and the reasons cited, or lack thereof, for implementing the shutdowns?

3. How are the personal, professional, and social lives of women in Manipur impacted and affected by temporary, intentional shutdowns of the Internet and/or mobile networks?
   - How do the affected women overcome or mitigate negative effects of shutdowns, and what tangible steps have they taken or considered taking?
Occurences of intentional Internet shutdowns

As recorded from interviews
1. Economic blockade in Imphal, December 17 to 30, 2016
2. Violence in Churachandpur district, September 1 to 15, 2015
3. Elections for the state legislature (MLA elections), Kangpokpi district, February 2017

Unverified shutdown:
For a few hours, unspecified date in 2017.

Recorded shutdowns since the study concluded
Mobile & Internet use among respondents
Smartphone Use
14 out of 16 respondents used at least one smartphone. 2 respondents used only basic mobile phones that were not Internet-enabled. One of them did not have the means to buy a smartphone, and the other borrowed it from a family member when needed.

Email Use
15 out of 16 respondents used email.

WhatsApp Use
14 out of 16 respondents used WhatsApp as a primary mode of communication.

Facebook Use
15 out of 16 respondents owned Facebook accounts and used them regularly for personal communication.
Impact of low Quality of Service (QoS) on the lives of respondents
Mobile network coverage in Manipur, India (indicated by hotspots)
Life in the time of shutdowns

--Loss of personal and professional standing
--Loss of work hours, productivity and professional efficiency
--Loss of work-life balance
--Reduced personal safety
--Negative impacts on mental health & emotional well-being
--Hindrance to crisis intervention
--Economic losses
--Strained relationships (personal, professional and social)
--Violation of the freedom of speech and expression, and the right to access the Internet
--No avenues for leisure & entertainment
Full research report, licensed CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International:
https://bit.ly/2IWzV3G [PDF]

Summary of findings:

Conference handout:
https://bit.ly/2GUeSM1 [PDF]

All materials at:
http://thebachchaoproject.org/of-sieges-and-shutdowns
Also see

Of Blackouts and bandhs: The strategy and structure of disconnected protest in India

Jan Rydzak, February 2019


“... network shutdowns in India are clearly not uniformly effective, but remain prohibitively costly when maintained.”

“... violent collective action rises in the wake of a shutdown while surges in non-violent action lose their momentum...”

“...a three-day blackout equates to a revenue loss of at least $559,000 while the work of civil society organizations suggests that a blackout of the same duration in J&K would cost the state economy $28.4 million.”