CHAPTER 4 – NETNOGRAPHY - FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The list of presented in Table 2 shows the various codes accompanied by the number of sources and references those codes acquired in the process. The leftmost column shows the name of the codes used to analyse the tweets, the middle column shows sources which means the number of participants that made references to the codes, and the rightmost column shows the number of references made of the code. The study focuses on the reasons why civic voluntarism and issue amplifications works out for a particular event and how it is carried out. Therefore, the study will provide us explanations into why social media activism works in specific circumstances and not others.

Most of the discourse will be focused on the Police shooting that took place on July 2021 (Event 4). As seen in Table 2, a majority of the discussion will revolve around Event 4 due to sheer volume of references as well as the number of sources that referenced it. A total of 43 users and 2274 references meant that Event 4 consisted of 86% of users as well as 91.84% of the total 2476 references.

Every tweet that falls within the timeline identified in Section 3.1.3 were coded into what the researcher considered the tweets intended and/or represent. Therefore, we find codes such as congratulatory message that mainly referenced the 2020 Summer Olympics held at Tokyo during July and August of 2021. Also, with regards to the code "Condolences", tweets referenced the death of celebrities such as Kobe Bryant, Stan Lee, and Juice WRLD, along with condolences expressed towards the families of the departed Assam Police forces during Event 4. References to COVID19 specific to Event 4 were related to the economic blockade created in Silchar that blocked essential materials needed by the Mizoram government in tackling the pandemic.

Even though only 16 users were identified as referencing Music and Musicians, the references amounted to 264. This was due to the fact that active Twitter users such as @Sammy_Varte made 109 references out of which a majority were regarding famous American singer Mariah Carey. Another user with 64 references @bawihiralteexo (the "exo" in her pseudonym refers to the K-pop band EXO), made references to K-pop bands, a majority of whom were BTS and EXO. The idea of Twitter as a space for fandom will be discussed more in Section 4.4.

The code "Media Content Sharing" was divided into six sub-categories. These content sharing practices were crucial during the political participation process. For example, news coverages or links to them were shared via tweets, retweets or quote tweets. The content sharing practices were compared with Twitter users of the study in Section 4.2.

Table 2. Coding data with Sources and References (in alphabetical order)

Name	Sources	References
Condolences	11	22
Congratulatory Message	23	74
COVID19	28	115
Entertainment		
Movies and TV Shows	13	80
Music and Musicians	*16*	*264*
Print	4	27
Video Games	1	1
Gratitude	21	99
Inquiry	20	66
Media Content Sharing		
Link to other websites	25	103
News content or news content link	24	162
Photo or photo link (including GIFs)	*43*	*1088*
Quote Tweets	*31*	*743*

Twitter Links (Profile or Event Links)	2	4
Video or Video link	36	355
Mocking		
Aggressive	5	23
Playful	4	17
Other issue-related tweets		
Common Issues	9	18
India	13	91
Mizoram	14	49
Outside India	9	44
Personal Tweets	27	197
Post related to Border Shooting (E4)	*43*	*2274*
Post related to CAA (E3)	14	105
Post related to CEO (E2)	12	88
Post related to Zophai (E1)	4	9
Quotes	15	31
Related to religion or religious quotes	18	54
Replies	*43*	*1941*
Replies to verified accounts	24	181
Retweets	*41*	*750*

Retweets of verified accounts	24	237
Sports	27	236
Well wishes	12	53
Wholesome	5	8

The code "Mocking" refers to tweets that mock other users, person, or groups in an aggressive or playful manner. Only six users were observed to reference this node among which 3 users use both aggressive as well as playful, two users only referenced aggressive mocking, while 1 user used only playful mocking. The observation of the references highlights the level of tension the discourse between some of the users of the opposite isles (Mizo and Assamese users) displayed at certain times. Even though it only accounted for a small fraction of the total references under observation, it is worth noting that aggressive mocking is more in number than that of playful forms. Furthermore, playful mocking exists within the realms of sports, where it is a norm between rival teams. Some users also used playful mocking to share jokes about famous individuals as well as politicians. The aggressive tones that dealt with questions of other peoples' mental aptitudes, propensity to divulge disinformation, lack of honour, and/or a general distaste for others occurred more within the Event 4 timeline.
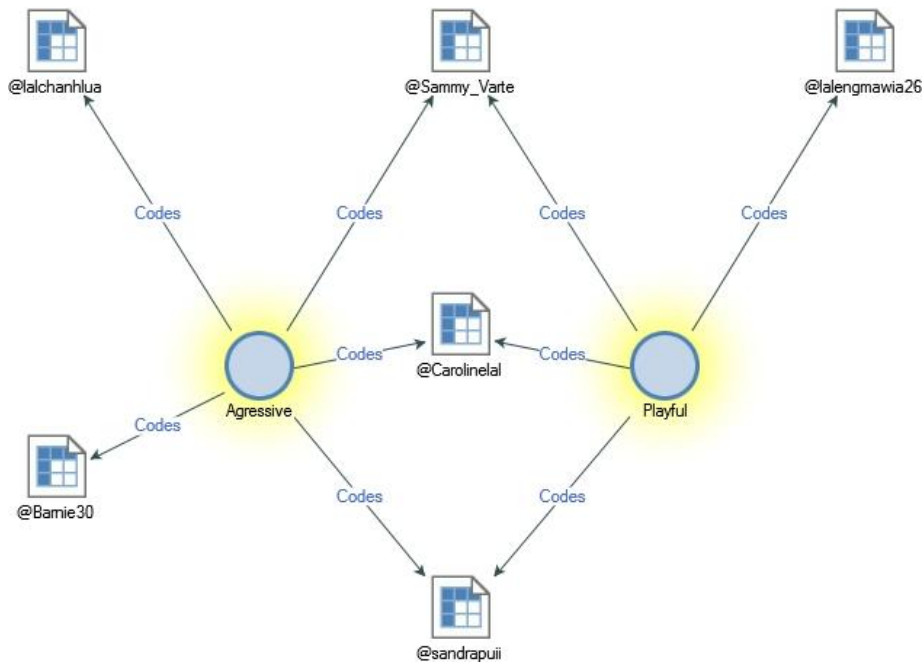
Figure 4. Comparison Diagram of users with reference to aggressive and playful mocking

The Comparison Diagram in Figure 4 represents two Codes, i.e. Aggressive and Playful in circular form left and right respectively. The users that fall in between are those that references both the codes while the ones on the left of the left code represent users that only exhibited aggressive mocking. The right side of code "Playful" denotes the only user that showed only playful mocking.

Users under observation also displayed interest on other issues that is not related to the problems mentioned in the timeline of events. The sub-categories under "Other issue-related tweets" included tweets that deal with issues that are considered common issues, issues inside India, issues related particularly to Mizoram, and those issues that are outside of India. Common issues include human rights related problems related to the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan, Climate Change, child welfare, etc. Issues related to India included economic issues (GDP), border issues in other parts of India, problems originating from caste, abuse of AFSPA and UAPA, issues related to surveillance (Pegasus), among other things. The internal problems in Mizoram that were referenced to include issues related to displacement of Reangs, cases of sexual assault, environmental issues cause by oil palm farming, concerns with language barriers, and self-sustenance. The issue of self-sustenance was heavily debated during the economic blockade that was implemented by agents in Silchar as a result of the clash that happened during Event 4.

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Personal Tweets consisted of 27 users that referenced the code 297 times. This code deals with tweets made by users with reference to their own character, likes, or preferences that are general in nature and are not related to the other nodes/codes that are specifically listed. These tweets are usually self-referential, personal, creative, poetic, or emotional in nature.

The main codes under focus were the "Post related to" section that represent the issues related to the four events. A tweet may be referential towards Events 1, 2, 3, or 4, or a combination of them. The tweets are coded with reference to these four events. Tweets are considered to be relevant to the one or more of the four event codes when tweets, replies, retweets, etc are related to the topic under consideration. It does not necessarily have to textually denote the connection with the codes. However, the researcher may establish a connection when tweets, replies, retweets, are observed to be an amalgamation of the issue events mentioned.

The code labelled "Quotes" were in reference to quote that are share via direct tweets, retweets, or quote tweets, and represent an expression made by someone else (that may or may not be mentioned). If the tweets were related to quotes from the Bible or some other religious texts, it comes under the next code labelled "Related to religion or religious quotes". Since Mizoram is a majority Christian state, it was observed that a lot of Twitter users were customary to religious discourse. Furthermore, since Event 3 occurs during December 2019 and January 2020, some of the references under this code were directly related to Christmas which takes place during December. Some of the tweets event relate to the political participation whereby users claim a sense of safety and protection through their religious beliefs.

Besides direct/original tweets, replies and retweets were the most frequently utilized mechanisms provided by the platform through which issue amplification were attempted. The code under "Replies" had the maximum number of references with 1941 references from 43 sources. The code "Retweets" also showed references amounting to 750 form 41 sources. Replies to tweets usually exhibit textual expressions that begin with the user tag (pseudonyms tagged with @ symbol), followed by comments that may include hashtags. The observations suggest that, even if participants involved in issue amplification have no unique or substantial message to contribute to the discourse, they would, at least, reply with the hashtag that was used during the event under consideration. The same applied for retweets as well.

The observations also indicated that verified accounts were effectively reoccurring in the process of discussion. This can be explained from the idea that verified accounts hold influential space on social media platforms, and therefore, enjoy extensive penetration and exposure on the platforms by virtue of which they garner attention from the general population.

The code "Sports" showed a high level of engagement since the timeline fell under the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as mentioned earlier. Indian athletes such as Lovlina Borgohain, Lalremsiami, P.V. Sindhu, and Neeraj Chopra garnered extensive media coverage at the time. Furthermore, the UEFA Euro 2020 that was held during June 11 to July 11, 2020 gathered a similar level of attention among Mizo Twitter users during that time.

The code lalbelled "Well wishes" consisted of general courtesy, Christmas festivities, birthdays, as well as those targeted towards the participants of the Olympics. Finally, the code "Wholesome" refers to post that are intended to evoke pleasant emotions among consumers of the message. These may include videos of good Samaritans helping the poor, adorable cat videos, or videos depicting the selfless acts of NGOs during the pandemic.

Even though the timeline specific study of tweets may detract from ideas of representation when it comes to users' expressions, the coding system as well as the quantity of references under consideration to an extent, gives a good explanation to how and why Mizo Twitter users utilize the platform.

4.1   Description of users

Considering the ethical concerns mentioned in Section 3.1.5, the pseudonyms of the participants are listed below with consideration of the codes and references of each, presented in order of frequency of references.

Table 3. Twitter users with Codes in descending order of References

Sl. No	Names (Twitter pseudonyms)	Nodes (Codes)	References
1.	@sandrapuii	17	875
2.	@zorini_lungtau	28	867

3.	@StacyMuanpuii	24	743
4.	@KhiangteJona	27	743
5.	@Barnie30	26	711
6.	@Sammy_Varte	27	544
7.	@lalengmawia26	26	507
8.	@bawihiralteexo	20	489
9.	@Lalvenchhunga	22	420
10.	@Carolinelal	25	398
11.	@lalchanhlua	24	371
12.	@pinkylalzui	21	291
13.	@TeteiRenthlei	21	273
14.	@IsaacZothanpuia	20	226
15.	@sundayamizo	15	182
16.	@szhmar	20	174
17.	@SomteySailo	22	160
18.	@josesailo22	17	160
19.	@Hmingi1212	8	141
20.	@DavidVankal7	15	137
21.	@Elizabethhmar12	6	128
22.	@thangtea_tzla	12	108

23.	@chocoralte	10	97
24.	@chzama	16	85
25.	@rody_hnialum	14	76
26.	@Lalmals72321086	9	74
27.	@Rkdinpuia	13	74
28.	@Ruby_hriatpuii	11	57
29.	@JCA61947592	11	54
30.	@VuiteMadika	7	54
31.	@TeteaHmar	12	49
32.	@christy_pachuau	8	43
33.	@NithangaRk	11	37
34.	@LalpiangL	9	33
35.	@rosie_chhangte	14	32
36.	@Jenny_Hnamte_	7	25
37.	@PautuMichael	6	25
38.	@elzeekhiangte	10	23
39.	@PensyBoitlung	8	22
40.	@Lalremr47272075	2	19
41.	@CindyNutei	8	16
42.	@ThlanteaC	4	12

43.	@RuataRa43198401	3	12
44.	@TheSawmteii	5	11
45.	@fellydrew	6	10
46.	@CrystalMalsawmi	5	9
47.	@Victorlart1	2	5
48.	@FelonyBawitlung	3	3
49.	@Kiko_Mahlima	2	2
50.	@Remtluangpuiis1	2	2

The important observation made during the study of the participants was that, firstly, Twitter use is not prevalent among the netizens of Mizoram. However, the extent to which Mizos went in order to participate in issue amplification was noticeably relevant since users that have never used Twitter, regardless of the unfamiliarity to the platform, decided to join the events. Some users, such as @CindyNutei seem to have created their Twitter profile specifically to join the political participation. Profiles such as @FelonyBawitlung had a Twitter profile since October 2018, however, her only tweet was regarding Event 4 on July 2021. Furthermore, the profile @Hmingi1212 joined Twitter on July 2021 as the call for action was at its peak. The user was identified as a K-pop enthusiast.

Even though the main intended outcome appears to prioritize attracting mainstream media's attention, however, users such as @christy_pachuau preferred direct engagement with the players from the other side of the aisle. The data did not indicate that the discourse undertaken by the user had any connection to the code labelled "Mocking", whether it'd be aggressive or not.

4.1.1 Familiarity of the platform

The list of Twitter users under observation are presented in chronological order with reference to the date they joined Twitter (created their profile) as well as the number of tweets that were

available during the timeline of events under observation. This section will try and study – 1) if user's familiarity of the Twitter platform relates to levels of participation; 2) how new users respond to the call for action.

The samples collected presented us with Twitter users that have used the platform since August 2008 all the way to August 2022. The account that have existed the longest among the samples belonged to an INC Party Worker (according to his Twitter bio) with the Twitter tag @lalchanhlua. The individual is one of the most active users among the group, having expressed concerns in three events out of the four, he is one of the few that were actively speaking against the CAA. Similarly, @Lalvenchhunga, a politician associated with the ZPM Party (according to his Twitter bio), was a few of the users that spoke against the CAA. Twitter appears to be a platform that is extremely attractive to politicians or those that participate in the political spaces. This idea was reflected on the list provided in Table 4. It is important to note that Tweets that fell under the specified timeline does not necessarily indicate that all tweets contain references to the events listed.

Table 4. Twitter users and their date of joining along with timeline related tweets.

Sl.no	Names (Twitter pseudonyms)	Month Joined (Year/Month)	Tweets that fell under - E4, E3, E2, E1
1.	@lalchanhlua	2008/08	127, 46, 2, 0
2.	@chzama	2009/02	48, 0, 0, 0
3.	@Lalvenchhunga	2009/03	167, 40, 0, 0
4.	@Barnie30	2009/04	308, 9, 9, 1
5.	@TheSawmteii	2009/04	2, 5, 0, 3
6.	@szhmar	2009/05	51, 18, 0, 0
7.	@IsaacZothanpuia	2009/09	87,10, 3, 2
8.	@lalengmawia26	2009/09	204, 60, 4, 24

9.	@Kiko_Mahlima	2010/02	0, 0, 1, 0
10.	@SomteySailo	2010/03	33, 8, 27, 8
11.	@StacyMuanpuii	2010/03	381, 0, 23, 0
12.	@fellydrew	2010/09	5, 0, 0, 0
13.	@thangtea_tzla	2011/03	75, 0, 0, 0
14.	@TeteaHmar	2011/05	16, 4, 2, 3
15.	@TeteiRenthlei	2011/08	132, 0, 19, 0
16.	@pinkylalzui	2011/09	165, 0, 0, 0
17.	@KhiangteJona	2012/02	285, 0, 0, 0
18.	@sandrapuii	2012/02	451, 0, 0, 0
19.	@PensyBoitlung	2012/04	6, 6, 0, 0
20.	@elzeekhiangte	2012/10	7, 3, 3, 0
21.	@Rkdinpuia	2013/05	40, 0, 0, 0
22.	@NithangaRk	2013/09	17, 3, 1, 0
23.	@sundayamizo	2013/12	33, 31, 8, 0
24.	@zorini_lungtau	2014/02	391, 102, 0, 0
25.	@rody_hnialum	2017/03	32, 1, 3, 1
26.	@DavidVankal7	2017/04	48, 12, 5, 5
27.	@christy_pachuau	2017/05	23, 0, 0, 0
28.	@Carolinelal	2017/12	99, 13, 50, 33

29.	@josesailo22	2017/12	35, 68, 7, 1
30.	@Remtluangpuiis1	2018/03	1, 0, 0, 0
31.	@bawihiralteexo	2018/04	226, 0, 0, 2
32.	@FelonyBawitlung	2018/10	1, 0, 0, 0
33.	@Sammy_Varte	2018/11	72, 147, 107, 0
34.	@chocoralte	2019/04	76, 0, 0, 0
35.	@Lalremr47272075	2019/09	19, 1, 0, 0
36.	@JCA61947592	2020/06	43, 0, 0, 0
37.	@Lalmals72321086	2021/05	49, 0, 0, 0
38.	@Elizabethhmar12	2021/06	105, 0, 0, 0
39.	@CindyNutei	2021/07	11, 0, 0, 0
40.	@CrystalMalsawmi	2021/07	4, 0, 0, 0
41.	@Hmingi1212	2021/07	70, 0, 0, 0
42.	@Jenny_Hnamte_	2021/07	10, 0, 0, 0
43.	@LalpiangL	2021/07	14, 0, 0, 0
44.	@PautuMichael	2021/07	11, 0, 0, 0
45.	@rosie_chhangte	2021/07	15, 0, 0, 0
46.	@Ruby_hriatpuii	2021/07	27, 0, 0, 0
47.	@ThlanteaC	2021/07	8, 0, 0, 0
48.	@Victorlart1	2021/07	4, 0, 0, 0

49.	@RuataRa43198401	2021/08	8, 0, 0, 0
50.	@VuiteMadika	2021/08	48, 0, 0, 0

The list also showed that users that created a profile early on does not necessarily mean they are active on the platform. Twitter users such as @Kiko_Mahlima had created a Twitter profile back on October 2010, but has posted just one tweet since then. The tweet in question was one retweet of a photo regarding Event 3. A number of users do not relate to the social aspect of Twitter, even going as far as to say the word-limit limits their capacity for expression. Furthermore, the availability of other more "social" platforms such as Facebook and Instagram provided for an alternative that discourages the use of Twitter (Bhat, 2023).

The list of Twitter users can therefore be group into three types. Firstly, those that are active on the platform whose utility of the platform may vary. Secondly, those that are inactive but occasionally use the platform when the necessity arises. Thirdly, individuals that have never used the platform but decided to join the process of political participation (especially in the context of Event 4).

For example, in Figure 5, we are presented with new users that were interested in joining the Twitter movement that was going on during Event 4. It was observed that a user replied to a query posted by @pinkylalzui that can be translated, "Did they call for another *Hnam hnatlang*[13] on Twitter?" to which @VuiteMadika asked, "How will the *hnatlang* proceed?". This interaction highlights two key points – 1) the idea that the movement was considered as a service that was rendered for the public good; and that 2) new users did not hesitate to seek advice on how the service was to be rendered.

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[13] See Section 1.4.1 for *Hnam Hnatlang* and explanation of the terminologies

Figure 5. New users and participation (Source: Twitter[14])

Another good example of a Mizo netizen joining Twitter with the intention of participating could be clearly demonstrated by the tweet presented in Figure 6 where the user stated that she just recently joined the platform. The translation of the tweet to English would read – "I recently created this account a few moments back. I'm in the learning process. Provide me some advice on how to use the platform. Because I want to partake in the *hnatlang* for our land and people. Whatever is required." She ended the tweet using two hashtags #mizoramspeaksout and #himantaexposed.

Figure 6. *Hnatlang* for our land and the people (Source: Twitter[15])

The political participation initiated on Twitter by various groups as well as the intensive interest garnered by the general population resulted in not only the mobilization of

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[14] https://twitter.com/pinkylalzui/status/1424033479910592515?s=20 Retrieved on January 18, 2023
[15] https://twitter.com/rosie_chhangte/status/1421525643867525122?s=20 Retrieved on January 21, 2023

existing Twitter users, but new users that entered the platform as a result of the recruitment process.

4.2 Comparative analysis of Media Content Sharing for participation in Event 4

This section will attempt to present the methods with which Twitter users of Mizoram use the platform with regards to media sharing for the purpose of disseminating information with specific focus on Event 4. The reason for this selection lies in the extent of participation the event had when compared to the other three events. It should be noted that any form of media content sharing may be related to, be a sole purpose, or be unrelated altogether to the event.

A comparison diagram was extracted using NVivo for the purpose of studying the number of users that engage in media content sharing in the context of Event 4. The Event 4 code is represented by a circle on the left, while media content sharing sub-categories are represented on the right. Therefore, users that represent both codes will be situated (and connected with the lines) in the middle of the codes, while those that only reference the event will be placed on the left of the code, while those that only share media content without referencing Event 4 will be positioned on the right side of the media content sharing code.

It must be noted here that not all 50 samples participated during Event 4. The participants of Event 4 amounted to 86% (*n*=43). The diagram will exhibit more personnel in the middle of the two codes when users utilize both attributes. For example, in Figure 7, we see 19 users on the left of the code "Post Related to Border Shooting" (Event 4), compared to the middle section comprise of 24 users that also attribute this code while also sharing "Links" to other websites. The user on the left, is a user that shared links to other websites but did not engage in political participation for Event 4.

Following the same method of analysis, Figure 7 also represented Event 4 code in comparison to news content sharing. In this instance, it was observed that 24 users' tweets fall under both codes while 19 users did not share any news content in their tweets. The Twitter activism, with regards to media content sharing, utilized sharing of photos the most. This is represented in Figure 8, with 39 users out of 43 having shared at least one photo with reference to Event 4. Furthermore, four users that shared photos on Twitter did not participate in the discourse that happened during Event 4. Quote Tweets are a method of sharing other users'

tweets with the added benefit of contributing your own message to the tweet. Since, sharing tweets, retweeting, and replying to tweets were the main mechanism to garner higher levels of engagement, quote tweets were also a necessary part of the entire crusade.

Sharing of Twitter links was the least used source of content sharing during the Twitter activism. Only two users were observed to share Twitter links to profiles of other users or Twitter events. In contrast, photos sharing as well as video sharing were the most common and seemingly effective way to disseminate information on the platform. Figure 9 shows video sharing done by 34 users while 9 users that participated during Event 4 did not share videos. The figure also displayed two users that share videos that were not active for Event 4.

The comparison diagrams presented a vision into how social media activism is practiced in Twitter. In the case of Mizo Twitter users, the study exhibited the importance of photo sharing, quote tweets, and video sharing as a means to amplify an issue.
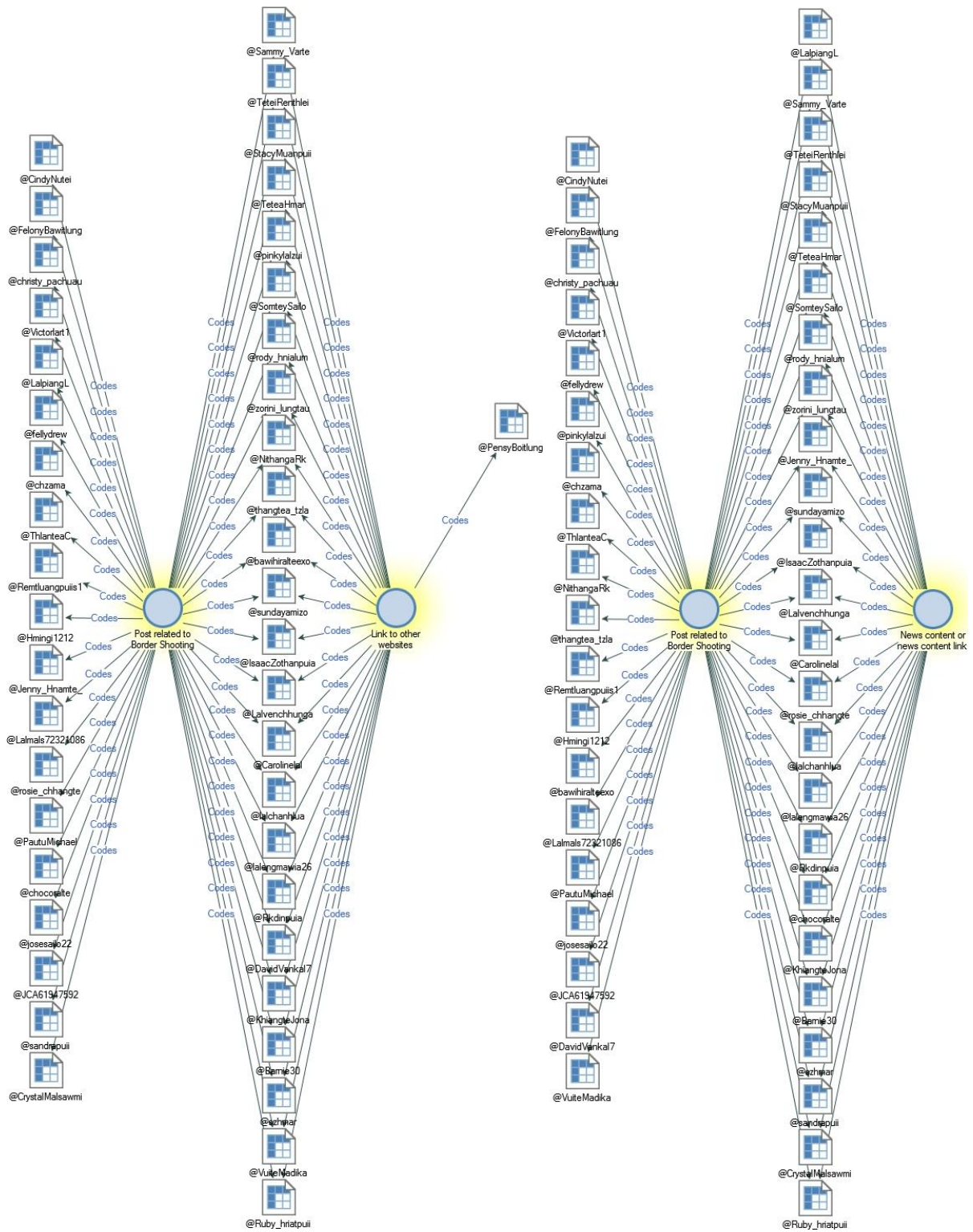
Figure 7. Comparison Diagram of Event 4 with Hyperlink sharing (Left) and News Content sharing (Right)
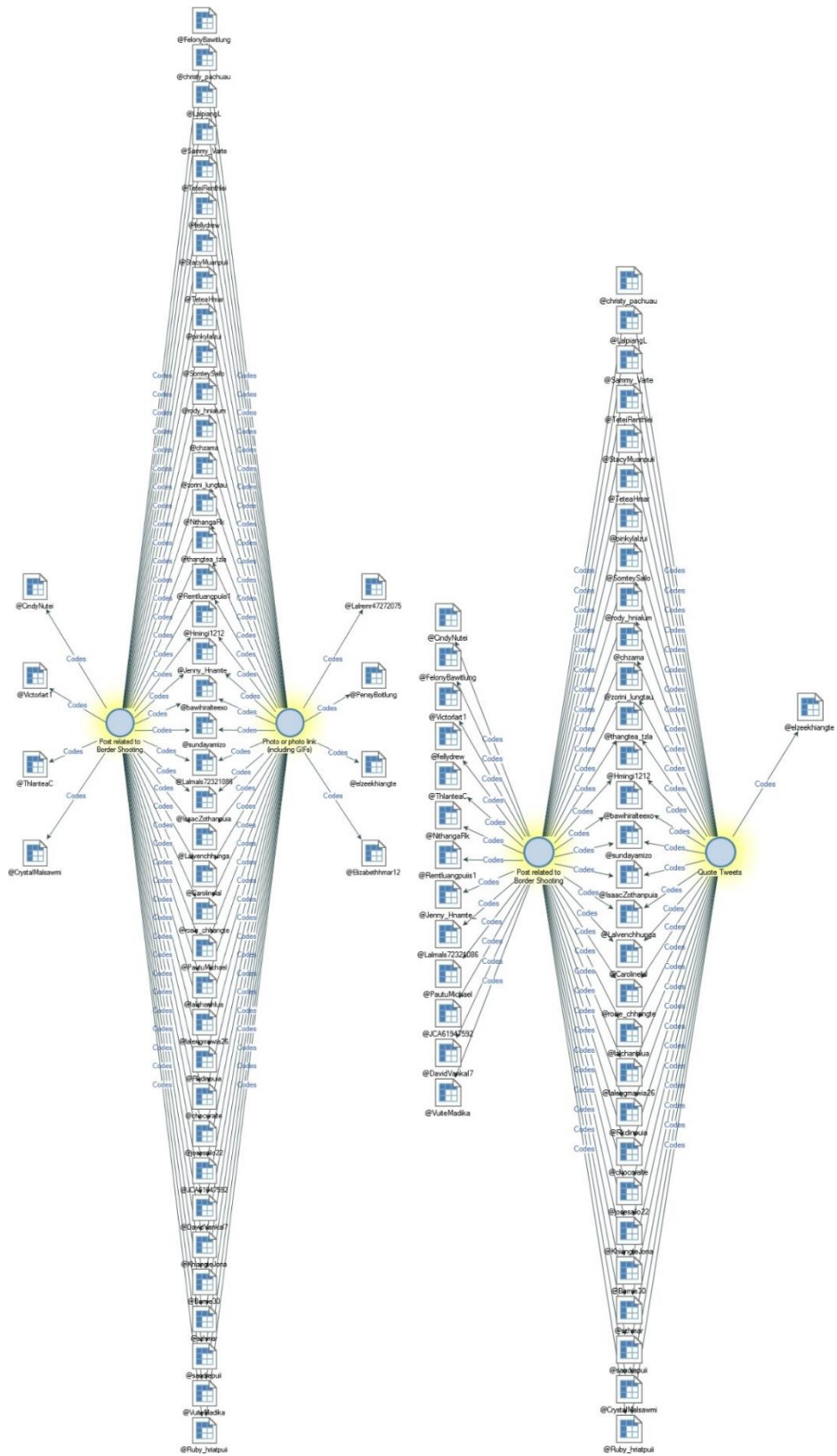
Figure 8. Comparison Diagram of Event 4 with Photos (Left) and Quote Tweets (Right) usage
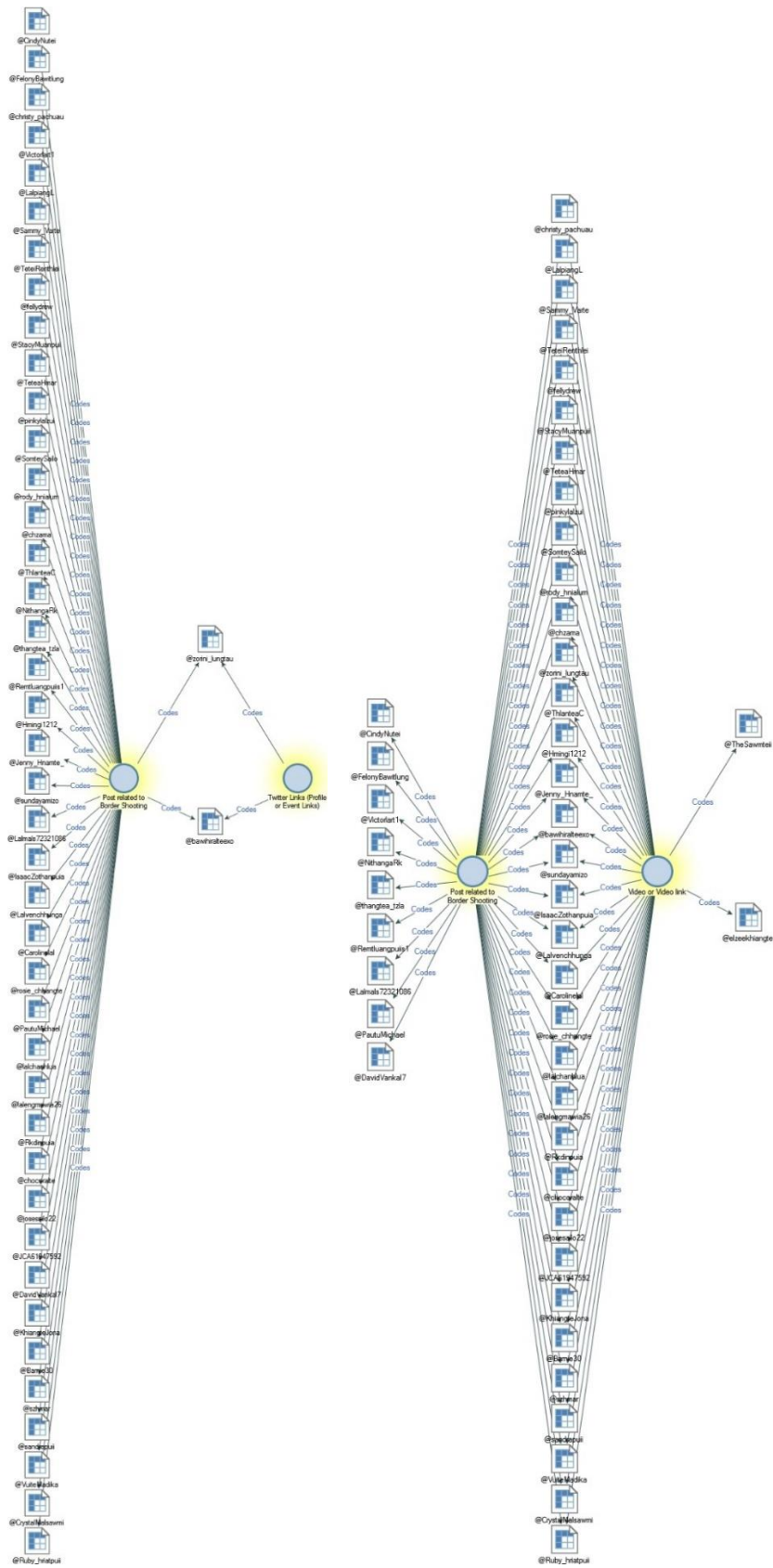
Figure 9. Comparison Diagram of Event 4 with Twitter Link (Left) and Video sharing (Right)

4.3 References to codes as a percentage of total tweets

The data collected through CAQDAS also provided the percentage coverage users' tweets have as a total of their tweets (those that are extracted using NCapture and not just the tweets that were considered within the timeline of events) with reference to Event 4. This means that certain users such as @FelonyBawitlung had only one tweet that was in reference to Event 4, the coverage was shown as 100%. Users such as @sandrapuii displayed the highest amount of references while still accounting for a very high level of coverage at 426 references to Event 4 which amounted to 91.99% of here total tweets. Therefore, it can be concluded that the user was heavily involved in issue amplification during Event 4.

Table 5. Users with number of references to Event 4 (in descending order of references)

Sl. No	Names (Twitter pseudonyms)	References	Coverage
1.	@sandrapuii	426	91.99%
2.	@StacyMuanpuii	233	9.24%
3.	@Barnie30	221	34.16%
4.	@KhiangteJona	182	50.84%
5.	@zorini_lungtau	138	4.29%
6.	@bawihiralteexo	135	21.05%
7.	@Lalvenchhunga	112	11.36%
8.	@pinkylalzui	79	7.12%
9.	@TeteiRenthlei	79	2.94%
10.	@Hmingi1212	66	11.74%
11.	@IsaacZothanpuia	59	22.01%
12.	@Carolinelal	54	4.93%
13.	@lalchanhlua	51	3.87%
14.	@VuiteMadika	45	80.36%
15.	@lalengmawia26	38	1.46%

16.	@szhmar	31	8.68%
17.	@rody_hnialum	29	38.67%
18.	@Ruby_hriatpuii	23	76.15%
19.	@Sammy_Varte	23	1.06%
20.	@chocoralte	22	3.28%
21.	@sundayamizo	22	14.47%
22.	@SomteySailo	21	0.70%
23.	@thangtea_tzla	21	6.16%
24.	@chzama	20	0.62%
25.	@christy_pachuau	17	13.28%
26.	@Rkdinpuia	16	2.90%
27.	@josesailo22	15	1.51%
28.	@LalpiangL	13	92.86%
29.	@DavidVankal7	11	1.86%
30.	@Jenny_Hnamte_	9	75.00%
31.	@Lalmals72321086	9	9.68%
32.	@PautuMichael	8	44.44%
33.	@rosie_chhangte	8	11.76%
34.	@JCA61947592	7	1.35%
35.	@NithangaRk	7	6.93%
36.	@CindyNutei	5	45.45%
37.	@TeteaHmar	5	0.83%
38.	@ThlanteaC	4	36.36%
39.	@Victorlart1	4	30.77%
40.	@CrystalMalsawmi	3	75.00%

41.	@FelonyBawitlung	1	100.00%
42.	@fellydrew	1	0.11%
43.	@Remtluangpuiis1	1	33.33%

4.4 Issue amplification and intended outcomes

The intended outcome of the social media activities for Events 2 and 3 were to accomplish a given demand. The demand here being the removal of the Chief Electoral Officer from his post (for E2), and the removal of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill that subsequently became the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (for E3). Events 1 and 4, even though demands were made by participants, the main intended outcome were to create a voice online that is loud enough to garner the interest of the mainstream media. The social media activism that followed Event 1 was focused on the condemnation of Assam Police's brutality against journalist and demonstrators as well as creating awareness on the border issues between Mizoram and Assam. This prevailing border issues and the rising tensions between the two Indian states resulted in Event 4 to transpire. The incident resulted in social media activism that was unlike any other that came before it.

Communities and groups on social media band together to achieve a common goal of reaching the maximum number of hashtags and activity to push their narrative up to the Trending section of Twitter. Studies have shown that traditional media outlets rely on Twitter trends for their content especially with reference to hashtags (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Hence, the idea behind creating a Twitter storm relies on the quantity of hashtags a community can accomplish for a given issue in order for that issue to gain media attention.

4.5 Fandom as the groundwork for social media activism

The observations suggested that Twitter users of Mizoram, especially those of the youth, utilize the platform to partake in fandom. Even though the timeline for study was limited to the 6 months that were mentioned in the event timelines, the observations indicated the existence of different kinds of fandom, the most common of which seem to be Mizo K-pop fans, a large

portion of which constitute the BTS[16] fandom that calls themselves *Army*. The social cohesion and unity between the members of these groups showed immense dedication and harmony. The prevalence of the Twitter pseudonym *@mkfc_official* (which stands for Mizo K-pop Fan Club Official) indicated that they played an important role during Event 4. Furthermore, the communities that propagate social media activism, though large as they may be, depended on the general audiences in order to gain the required clout for favourable coverage in traditional media outlets.

The Mizo K-pop community, to a certain extent tried to dictate the direction that the activism should progress in order to maintain a level of cohesion among the participants. The image presented in Figure 10 is one such example. The post was created by the group in order to notify participants how to tweet with the purpose of having the maximum circulation. The image contains bullet points made by the community in *Duhlian* language, when translated to English would be equivalent to –

1) If possible, we would like our post to be accompanied with meaningful words and/or pictures.

2) Let it be legible for other communities (also in terms of language).

3) Circulation of each other's tweets is recommended for high engagement.

4) Avoid spamming if possible.

5) Using the wrong spellings should be avoided.

The post was then accompanied by a photo that had the hashtag #mizoramspeaksout along with texts that read "The truth about Mizoram | Assam border". The observations indicated that the community, apart from attaining noticeable presence on Twitter also wanted their ideas to be heard. The community discouraged spamming, recommends correct spellings, use of languages that other communities would be able to understand, and accompanied by meaningful thoughts and/or pictures for this intended outcome to foster. Even though

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[16] BTS translates to the Korean phrase Bangtan Sonyeodan, or the Bangtan Boys. In English, this directly translates to "Bulletproof Boy Scouts."

spamming hashtags all over Twitter would increase the possibility for that hashtag to start trending, the community was more favourable towards spreading their message across the platform.

The idea that this unity and cohesion between the fandom created a social media movement seemed undeniable. However, unity and solidarity under a common interest (fandom) did not seem to be the sole motivator for political participation. Furthermore, the observations indicate that the issue amplification and media hype rested on the extend of media attention that the event received. The Mizo K-pop fans, therefore, would not be able to amplify any issue they desired at any given time, since it also require general audience interest as well as mainstream media attention to any given issue.
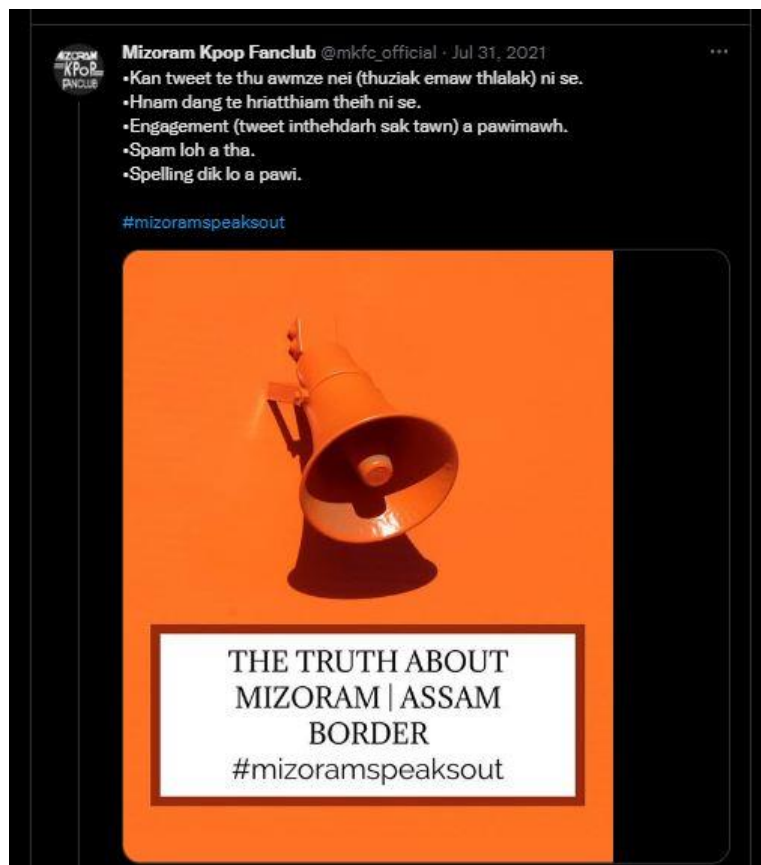
Figure 10. *@mkfc_official* conducting social media activism (Source: Twitter[17])

Other accounts such as *@mizoraminsta* were also communities that participated in the movement. The pseudonym is associated with a profile that is created on Instagram that promotes Mizo cultures and beauty.

4.6   Analysis of photos circulated by netizens

The findings indicated that Twitter activities were a result of information gathered within other social media platforms such as WhatsApp, image sharing sites such as Instagram, and Facebook.
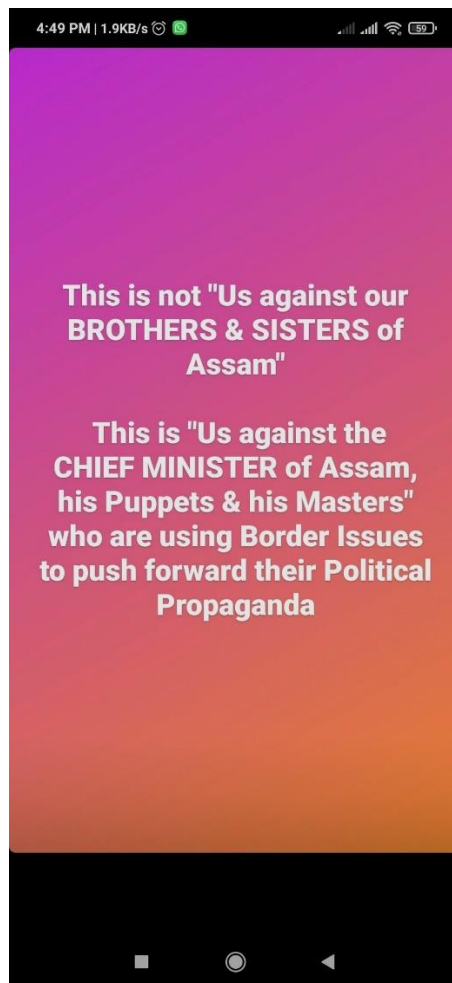
Figure 11. An image that originated from Instagram that was used on Twitter

The image presented on Figure 11 was an image that was generated on Instagram, the image of which was taken by the screenshot option provided by smartphones and was subsequently shared on Twitter. The observation was made by virtue of which the image is vertically oriented with the default aspect ratio smartphones, with navigation panel at the

bottom and notification bar at the top. The image itself also exhibited evidences of the photos being Instagram stories with the default "Create" story background and CLASSIC font that is provided by Instagram (as of January 2023). The photo shown in Figure 10 also highlighted an observation that was made during analysis with regards to the instructions given by communities and/or individuals on how to best progress in the issue amplification process. Figure 5, specifically originated out of the notion that many participants became aggressive and divisive in their approach, which did not sit well with other participants. The purpose of this photo that originated on Instagram was to create a unified mindset with a common target and intent so as to not muddle the communication channels. It was understood that using common hashtags and tweets would promote a common narrative and create issue amplification through the hashtags that are easily quantifiable. Another example is given in Figure 12, which took place during Event 2 that highlighted three important observations – 1) the photo served the purpose of instructing participants to a common narrative that will garner more attention; 2) the photo served as a unifying voice evident with the use of the Mizoram political map adorned with traditional garments; 3) the colours red, white and black, are colours from the Young Mizo Association (the largest NGO in Mizoram) flag; and 4) indicators of recruitment for the purpose of issue amplification.

The events under consideration provide us an insight into how social media activism is used by Mizos to amplify issues. The observations found that communities like *@mizoraminsta*, *@mkfc_official*, and other communities some of which were Twitter pages of media houses, were responsible for issue amplification and shaping of narratives.

Analysis of photos such as those in Figure 11 and 12 already showed how ideas are circulated in order to form a common narrative. A photo circulated by *@mizoraminsta* presented in Figure 13 represents examples of how certain groups (that have no political backing) decide to propagate a mainline narrative that is acceptable to all, backed with facts they collected, accompanied by mindsets that the groups want the general population of participants to share. The groups' existence when it comes to *@mkfc_official* and *@mizoraminsta*, as mentioned earlier, are based on the shared interest of K-pop and the promotion of Mizo culture and beauty respectively. They do not appear to be affiliated with any political party or have any monetary benefits from parties that may influence their decision making. Their activities when it comes to promoting a narrative for issue amplification seem

to originate from the notions of Mizo *tlawmngaihna* that was discussed in Section 1.4.1. The image shown in Figure 12 has the line "join the cause" in capital letters on the top. This provided a direct invitation to participate in the social media activism that was taking place. The image also had portrait photos of the two individuals that were at opposing sides of the argument accompanied by hashtags #supportchuaungo and #shanshakout underneath respective pictures.

This image represents how participants of the social media movement invites others from the Mizo community to "join the cause". The red, white, and black colours that represent the YMA is meant to impose the same sentiments of identity and chivalry. Not only is the YMA the largest non-governmental organisation in Mizoram, it also exists to serve the needs of the community and promotes Mizo identities through activities within the community (Singh, 2017). The image also has a caption at the bottom that states that the "cause" is specifically related to land issues, identity, and honour. Even though the individuals that made the image claim that the cause has nothing to do with political affiliations, it would be inaccurate to assume that this statement represents all participants of the cause.

Figure 12. Recruitment to a common cause (Source: Twitter)

However, images such as those of Figure 12 is limited in its representation of the event (E2). It does not provide enough information for anyone outside the Mizo community who might have been unaware of the incident. The image on Figure 13 provides an insight into how @*mizoraminsta* provided facts and arguments for opinion formation for Event 2. This was done by providing bullet points for timeline of events in order to educate the participants as well as provide them a narrative they can easily intensify through social media. The image borrows from the famous *For Dummies*[18] book series for their image title calling it "The issue for dummies" in bold capital letters at the top. The image also provided the hashtag that was promoted among the community at the time (E2).

Figure 13. Information sharing. (Source: Twitter)

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[18] Book series that provides a vast collection of instruction manuals meant to provide readers with approachable guidelines for the numerous areas they cover.

An online media house @*thelanternpost* (previously @*mizoexpress.com*) were also active during this time with posts that reflect on event coverage as well as opinion sharing with regards to the contentious issues. But these were examples of media houses and did not participate as individuals or as groups representing individuals. The most active and influential among these different groups

4.7 Hashtags as a tool for issue amplification

The effectiveness of Twitter hashtags extends beyond grouping of expressions regarding collective ideas. By sharing these hashtags, the participants seem to intend on two things – 1) reaching a level of *trending* that attracts media attention as well as other users on the platform; and 2) to share their side of the arguments on issues related to the events. This second reason is why it was recommended (as shown in Figure 10) that users accompany hashtags with meaningful words or pictures so that the hashtags not only serve to reach higher numbers, but also provide for information that could be useful for those that follow the hyperlink provided by the hashtag.

Figure 14. Twitter trending party (Source: Twitter[19])

The Mizo K-pop Fan Club (@*mkfc_official*) as mentioned in Section 4.5 were pivotal in starting a hashtag trend on Twitter. This was done by starting what they term the Twitter

[19] https://twitter.com/mkfc_official/status/1421110891961978880?s=20 Retrieved March 20, 2023

Trending Party and suggested hashtags that the group will mass tweet at a specific time of the day. As seen in Figure 14, the group suggested that users will stop using the previous hashtag #resignassamCM and start using the new hashtag #supportmizorampolice starting from 8:00PM that night (July 20, 2021). The photo tweeted out had 37 replies, 295 retweets, and 264 likes and the hashtag became one of the most frequently used hashtags during Event 4. Even though participants were allowed to use any hashtag they wanted, the suggestion going around during the movement from Mizo Twitter users was that they follow these hashtags proposed by larger groups since the chances of trending was higher.

Figure 15. A trending tweet (Source: Twitter[20])

The figures as well as photos presented are only a few of those that were shared among users at the time. Figure 15 represents a photo that was a created by taking a screenshot from the trending page of Twitter that was then shared by @*mkfc_official* in order to inform their community of the success their activities could manage. The hashtag #supportmizorampolice was one of a few hashtags used by Twitter users of Mizoram to share their narratives during Event 4. Figure 16 shows the list of hashtags used by the Twitter users under observation. It must be noted that the list is made from all tweets collected from NCapture and not just the tweets observed during the timeline of events.

The second motivation for creating hashtags trends was not only have the highest level of reach, but also for users to share their own narratives in the Twitter space. Spreading a narrative also does not always mean you utilize only hashtags your community is using. A good example of this happened during Event 4 when Mizo Twitter users noticed that the hashtag

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[20] https://twitter.com/mkfc_official/status/1421127583605792772?s=20 Retrieved March 20, 2023

#iStandWithHimanta started trending in support of the Assam CM[21], which they promptly used themselves to spread their narrative. Using a trending hashtag created by players from the other aisle provided an effective means to share information that is not restricted to just their own.

The top 50 hashtags are presented in Figure 16. The list of hashtags that were used during the events can be seen with #supportmizorampolice showing highest number of uses with 288. The hashtags #mizoramspeaksout was the third highest with 163, closely followed by #resignassamCM and #shameonhimantabiswa at 155 and 130 respectively. All of the hashtags that were mentioned either in the tweets studied or those that are mentioned in the questionnaire such as #shashankout and #supportchuaungo were all seen among the top 50 most used hashtags among the users.

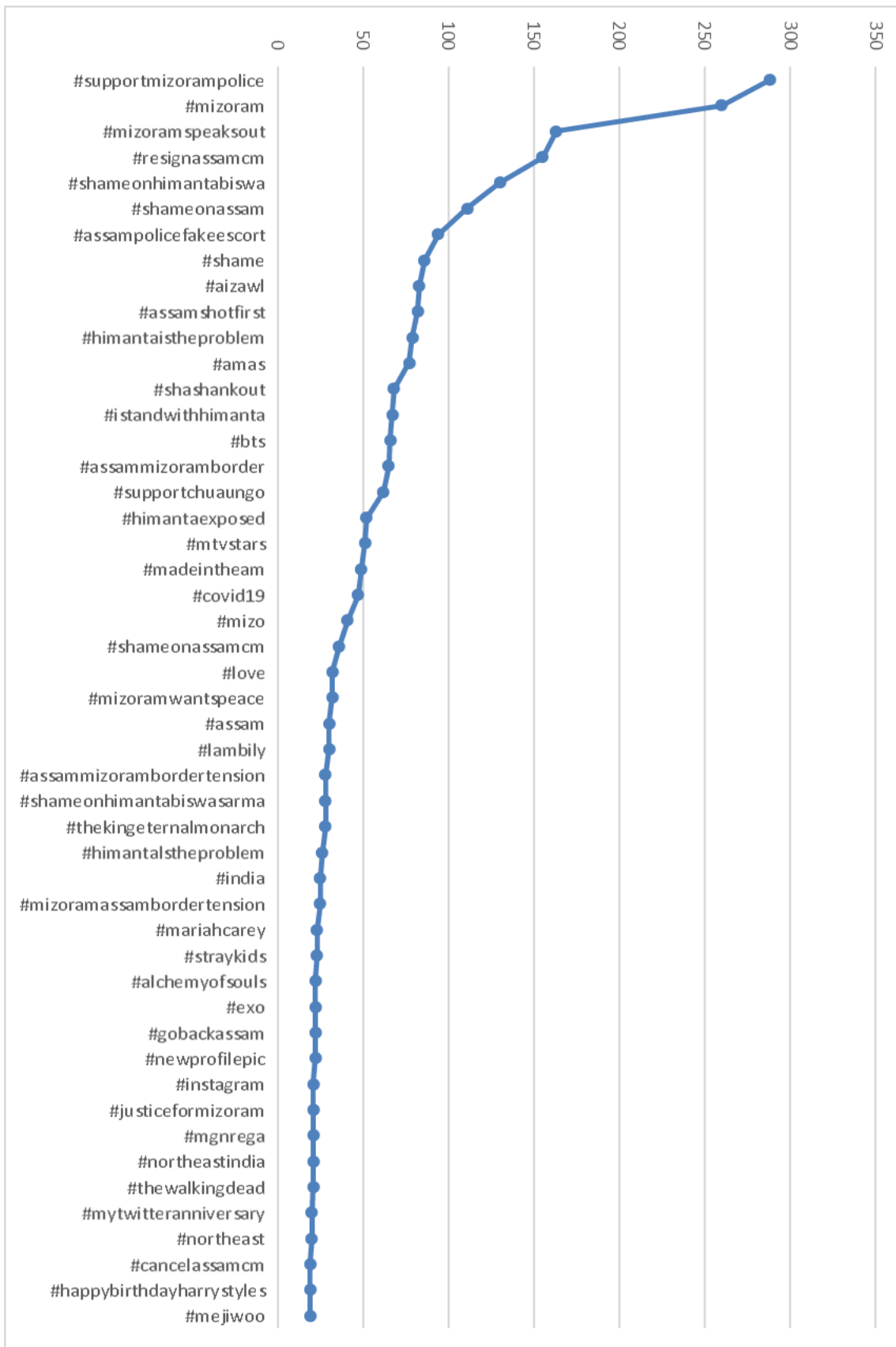[21] Himanta Biswa Sarma, BJP, has been the Chief Minister of Assam since 2021.

Figure 16. Top 50 hashtags used by 50 Twitter users

Figure 17. Hijacking a trending hashtag (Source: Twitter[22])

The above image represents how some users decided to hijack a trending hashtag created in support of the Assam CM. The user used the hashtag #iStandWithHimanta and added a hashtag #mizoramspeaksout while sharing a quote tweet regarding a narrative the user made previously. The success of using trending hashtags from the opposite side of an argument surrounding an issue is that interested parties using the hashtag are now forced to consume narrative they would have otherwise never consumed. This practice is not uncommon as previously mentioned in Section 1.2.2 regarding the issue of police violence where a hashtag #MyNYPD was created in support of the police forces in New York after which players from the opposite aisle decided to use the same hashtag to post pictures and videos depicting police brutality (Jackson & Welles, 2015; Jackson, et al., 2020).

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[22] https://twitter.com/zorini_lungtau/status/1421507236921102336?s=20 Retrieved on March 20, 2022

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