Migration and Diversity
December 2025
Volume: 4, No: 2, pp. 15 – 31
ISSN: 2753-6904 (Print) ISSN: 2753-6912 (Online)
journals.tplondon.com/md
TRANSNATIONAL PRESS® LONDON

Received: 25 September 2025 Accepted: 29 October 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33182/md.v4i2.3597

Digital discords and digital othering: How social media practices in the diaspora mimic the home-grown social inequalities among the Indian migrants in Germany

Arani Basu, Amrita Datta, Amrita Rudra[1]

Abstract

Media play a pivotal role in the construction of transnational social fields, immigrants' experiences in host countries, and diaspora formation. This is specifically true for contemporary migration, in which social media through digital platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp increasingly play transformational roles by acting as a link between the immigrants' onsite activities and their online practices. In light of this, this study focuses on the newly emerging diaspora of Indian immigrants in Germany, who arrive as international students and European Union Blue Card holders. Our objective in this paper is to examine their transnational media consumption practices and understand how the online-onsite interface informs the formation of an emerging Indian diaspora in Germany. Through fieldwork conducted in multiple German cities with a strong presence of Indians, this paper argues that social media enables the digital transportation of domestic social biases, identity politics, and other political divides quicker than earlier, thereby creating more fragmentation and ambivalence in the diaspora from its inception. Social media practices of newly arriving and evolving immigrant communities like the Indians in Germany already mimic the social inequalities played out in their home countries, contributing to the perpetuation of othering and social marginalization across the transnational social fields and within the diaspora. We call this "digital othering" produced by "digital discords" witnessed in transnational media consumption that migration studies must pay attention to.

Keywords: Digital media, digital othering, social media, diaspora, Indian immigrants, Germany.

Introduction

Transnational media consumption among immigrants dates back to when letters were exchanged across borders (Madianou and Miller 2011). Migration studies have a long tradition of knowledge production on the media's role in migration and mobilities. Located within the larger context of transnationalism (Vertovec, 1999) immigrants' media consumption practices gained attention mainly after the arrival of the Internet. In the pre-internet era, Appadurai

[1] Arani Basu teaches Sociology and Social Anthropology at Krea University, India. Amrita Datta is a lecturer at the Department of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany. Amrita Rudra has completed her M.A. from The London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom.

(1996) discussed how an immigrant's imagination of the homeland is based on the collective nostalgia gathered across time and space – a quintessential transnational practice centering on the memory of the past. In the age of the internet and social media, temporality as a concept has been restructured with greater immediacy, unlike what was possible a few decades ago. Earlier, migrants as collectives had to depend on each other as well as medium- and long-distance telephones, television satellites, and postcards for exchanging information, sharing sentiments, and expressing solidarity across borders. From that standpoint, the media's contribution to diaspora formation, in general, was relatively weak and secondary. However, the Internet has changed all that.

The role of the Internet in immigration experiences in the host society, and transnational practices has received attention from scholars such as Parham (2005), Cunningham (2001), Hiller and Franz (2016), Brouwer (2004) (Mallapragada, 2006; Skop and Adams, 2009), Hopkins (2008), Karim (1998), and Mustafa and Chen (2010), to name a few. Through this engagement with "digital migration" Leurs (2018) has drawn our attention to migration infrastructure as the enabling factor for migration aspirations and decisions. In the background of these conceptual frameworks, the media-migration interface must also draw from the existing works of Ingrid Therwath (2007) on Islamophobia in the Indian diaspora in the USA and N. Jayaram's work on Indians in the Caribbean (2009) and the internal dynamics within the diaspora, and examine the role of social media in exacerbating or reducing such social cleavages.

Conflicts within diaspora and their social media manifestations, othering and discrimination are increasingly gaining traction as a subject of discussion within migration studies. In relation to this, we draw on the theoretical framework of digital nationalism. Digital nationalism, as conceptualized by Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez (2021), highlights the transformative role of digital media in shaping contemporary nationalist movements. Rather than merely serving as channels for nationalist messages, digital platforms actively construct and perform nationalism by enabling rapid communication, affective expression, and the formation of virtual communities. Digital nationalism also contributes to the fragmentation of national imaginaries, as multiple competing nationalist discourses coexist online, often reinforcing exclusionary boundaries against ethnic, religious, or ideological minorities. In light of this broader theoretical context, this paper the social media practices of the Indian immigrants in Germany.

Indian migrants in Germany

As a newly emerging diaspora, Indian immigrants in Germany draw our attention to explore this subject. The latest phase of immigration from India to Germany involves the arrival of European Union Blue Card Holders[2] and students, leading to the slow yet steady expansion of Indian communities in the host country and the emergence of a new diaspora in Germany dominated by white-collar immigrants from India. Consequently, witnessing the rise of a new diaspora with distinct transnational practices, including those related to digital and social

---

[2] EU Blue Card holders are mostly highly skilled professionals with university degree employed in the fields of IT, data science and related technology-based jobs. European Union started the Blue Card scheme in 2012, to attract skilled workers from outside Europe to bring their families on a long-term basis to live and work in the EU member states. This framework of family migration visa that offers eligibility of full-time employment to the spouses of the Blue Card holders has made the Blue Card scheme highly popular. Germany so far has been the top country receiving the highest number of Blue Card holders, followed by France, Poland and Luxemburg.

media, our focus here is to locate those practices and examine their consequences on the newly emerging Indian diaspora in Germany at large.

White-collar or high-skilled[3] emigration from India is not a new topic of discussion in the literature. According to the World Migration Report 2024, India continues to be the largest country of origin for international migrants, with 18 million Indians living abroad, followed by Mexico and China. However, what is perhaps new and interesting is, first, that the rate of emigration has increased since the pandemic and, second, that Indians are now choosing new countries to immigrate to, in addition to their classical choices.

While the USA remains the top destination country for Indians, Germany, as one of the most active member states of the European Union with its Blue Card offering, has emerged as a formidable competitor. Interestingly, Germany has so far welcomed the maximum number of white-collar immigrants from a third country to live and work there as Blue Card holders, with Indian migrants topping the chart, with the Chinese as a distant second.

Indian immigration in Germany is not a new phenomenon, but recent studies show a visible increase in their numbers (Datta 2023, Faist et. al 2017). As such, Indian migration to Germany can be divided into four phases. The first phase started in the 1950s with the arrival of Indian students in Germany; the second phase is marked by the arrival of nurses from Kerala to work in hospitals in the then West Germany in the 1960s (Datta and Basu 2023, Goel 2008), the third phase started with the massive outflow of Punjabis and Sikhs due to the Khalistan Movement in Punjab in the 1970s and the 1980s (Tatla, 1999) and the latest phase, that is, the fourth phase, began with the introduction of the Green Card Scheme (2000) by the German government, which initially brought 20,000 Indian high-skilled IT and Finance professionals to the host society. This was followed by the arrival of Indian students for higher education in Germany, which still continues (Gottschlich, 2012) and lastly, the Blue Card holders.

According to the data released by the Institut fuer Deutschen Wissenschaft, IW-Report 1/2022, between 2010 and 2020, the total number of Indians in Germany (57.6% of whom are white-collar immigrants) increased from 42,000 to 1,59,000. According to the BAMF[4], 246,125 Indians currently live in Germany. In addition, the percentage of Indian students joining German universities has increased from 25, 149 in 2021 to 42,753 in 2024 (Source: DeStatis 2024[5]). The average age of the German population is 42 (DeStatis, 2021), leading to an acute labor shortage, particularly in the IT and other technical sectors. Thus, it is not surprising that Germany has received the highest number of Blue Card holders in comparison to the other EU member states.

Putting these numbers into context, perhaps it is safe to say that the EU Blue Card is increasingly gaining popularity among Indians considering immigration to Germany (Datta

[3] In this paper, the white-collar immigrants are referred to as highly skilled. While we are aware of limitations of the term "skill", in migration research as such "highly skilled" quintessentially refers to a specific profile of immigrants who are able to access a regular migration pathway as opposed to those who are forced to navigate through dangerous tracks with or without documents. From that standpoint, "highly skilled" must be considered here through the lens of a socio-cultural and economic status that white-collar immigrants are able to maintain, even transnationally.

[4] BAMF stands for Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

[5] In 2024, Indians constitute the seventh largest immigrant population in Germany (https://www.statista.com/statistics/894238/immigrant-numbers-by-country-of-origin-germany/)

2023). It is also perhaps not ambitious to project that this number will continue to grow, given the current employment situation in India and the growing labor shortage in Germany.

There are several reasons behind the popularity of the Blue Card. It not only offers work permits to potential employees from a third country but also to their spouses. In addition, the immigration pathway is streamlined, meaning that migrants can move as a family (unlike in other cases, where they have to apply for a family reunion visa, which takes months to process). This framework has so far been highly popular among Indians moving in their mid-thirties, often with small children, and partners with careers.

Looking at migration in a post-pandemic global order, immigrants are increasingly interested in long-term opportunities rather than short-term gains, and family matters continue to weigh as much as employment. In light of this, Germany has emerged as a popular destination for Indians. Among the highly skilled white-collar immigrants, it is a matter of convenience that they are able to migrate as a unit, not just as individuals.

It is also interesting to note that Indian students are choosing Germany, often over the USA and other classically popular education destinations. This is largely because the tuition fees at German universities are nominal compared to those in the USA. In addition, tuition fees at German public universities are much cheaper than in the USA, and in the last ten years, Germany has been more open to English-language programs at the university level. It must also be borne in mind that Indian students immigrating to Germany for higher education are future Blue Card Holders. From that standpoint, for these students, the promise of the Blue Card is not just immediate but futuristic.

Digital nationalism in the Indian context involves the articulation and amplification of nationalist ideologies through digital platforms, where nationhood and belonging are actively negotiated rather than passively reflected. For the relatively young Indian diaspora in Germany, active social media use becomes a critical space where these nationalist identities are constructed and contested. Social media thus serves as a site for the formation of affective communities that reinforce exclusionary boundaries along religious and cultural lines. The entrenched social inequalities in India such as caste and religious divides between Hindu upper-caste majoritarianism, Muslims, and Dalits - are not only reproduced offline but are also digitally mediated and intensified within these online diaspora spaces.

Hindutva politics, which centers Hindu identity as fundamental to Indian nationhood, provides an ideological framework that informs digital discourses around these divides. In the diaspora, Hindutva-inflected narratives on social media platforms often marginalize minority groups, reinforcing exclusionary practices through digital othering. This is evident in the politicization of everyday cultural practices, such as dietary customs - vegetarianism versus meat-eating which become symbolic markers of identity and boundary-making. These food practices, as noted by Roohi (2017) in the U.S. Indian diaspora, are similarly significant in Germany, where they are embedded within broader digital nationalist discourses that delineate who belongs to the imagined community and who is excluded.

The interaction between digital nationalism and Hindutva politics thus shapes how identity politics unfold among Indians in Germany. Social media platforms facilitate the circulation of nationalist narratives that not only connect diaspora members but also fragment them, producing clusters of exclusion based on religious and cultural identities. This fragmentation reflects the ideological underpinnings of Hindutva, which legitimizes exclusionary practices

and digital othering by constructing the 'other' as a threat to the cultural and political homogeneity of the nation.

Incorporating this theoretical framework highlights that the political, religious, and culinary practices among Indians in Germany are deeply intertwined with digital processes of nationalism and exclusion. It situates social media as a constitutive space where diaspora identities (Basu 2025) are actively produced through the negotiation of belonging, shaped by the ideological currents of Hindutva and the dynamics of digital nationalism.

Methodology: Focus, Research Ethics and Consent

We conducted online and on-site interviews in various German cities where Indian Blue Card holders and students live and work. Berlin currently has the highest number of Blue Card Holders, followed by Cologne-Bonn and Munich. While students remain scattered across various German university towns and big cities, we chose the aforementioned cities for fieldwork that already have a significant number of Indian students enrolled in German universities.

We interviewed 17 participants aged between 25 and 40. Based on the interviews and content analyses of social media groups of Indian highly skilled migrants in Germany, we argue that the social media consumption practices of Indians in Germany investigated in this paper are largely dominated by Hindu practices, whereas Muslims are conspicuous by their absence. We further submit that such othering and anti-Muslim sentiments mimic political polarization in the home country, informed by migrants' transnational media engagements.

Field and participants, Ethical clearance and Interview formats

To understand the social media consumption practices of Indian highly skilled migrants in Germany, we chose two digital media platforms: Facebook and WhatsApp. For media consumption, participants mostly used Facebook and WhatsApp. Facebook Groups such as Indians in Germany, Indians in Berlin, Indian Expat Women in Munich and Germany, and Indian Women in Berlin are popular. All these groups are private, and one must demonstrate a valid reason for joining. Indians in Germany is one of the oldest Facebook groups formed by Indian immigrants in Germany, catering to various questions and sharing information with them. It has a membership of 62.1 thousand and was established in 2012. Indians in Berlin has 15, 000 members and was created in 2016. The third group, Indian Expat Women in Munich and Germany, has approximately 2, 500 members and was started in 2016. The last group we are interested in in this paper, that is, Indian Women in Berlin, started in 2017 and had about 3,100 members. There are several smaller groups based on regional affiliations, like Bengalis in Berlin, Marathi Mitras, and Gujarati Samaj in Germany, to name a few. However, our focus is on the four most popular groups, given that group memberships often overlap and most of our participants are already members of these four groups, apart from their membership in groups with a regional focus.

We connected with our participants via these Facebook groups and later met them onsite and online for conversations. Our participants in Berlin, Cologne-Bonn, and Munich were predominantly young, and a mix of students and corporate employees from multiple genders and religious affiliations. Since our focus was on highly skilled Indian migrants, we chose the participants through purposive sampling (Suri, 2011). We shared an information sheet with the participants to obtain informed consent. Therefore, all data were collected and presented

following the GDPR[6] and Horizon Europe's good scientific practices. Interviews were not audio-recorded to maintain conversational flow and participant comfort; field notes and transcripts were used instead. We have gathered all data maintaining anonymity and full confidentiality; all names and details of our participants mentioned in this paper are fictitious.

It is also worth mentioning that, as researchers, we are cultural insiders within the community of Indians in Germany. Our location as cultural insiders helped us access the field, enter the field, and build rapport with our participants (Taylor, 2011; Brayboy and Deyhle, 2000). This location of cultural insiders also positioned us for participant and non-participant observation. However, we are aware of our political location as cultural outsiders. Researchers as cultural insiders could be doubly axed for interfering with the research outcome, even unwillingly, simply because their scientific observation could be compromised by their cultural identification with participants.

Under the broader umbrella of insider research, this debate has a long tradition with reference to ethnographers' privileges and challenges on and off the field (Taylor 2011). We, as a team of three researchers, are both insiders and outsiders (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000) – while all of us hold Indian passports, none of us are Blue Card holders or students in Germany, making our familiarity with the participants suitable enough for them to feel comfortable participating in the interviews, yet distinct enough from directly comparing our lived experiences with theirs.

This is where we intended to introduce reflexivity as an enabling tool of research. Reflexivity helps researchers who are cultural insiders maintain awareness of their positionality, biases, and assumptions during qualitative interviews (Schinozaki 2012). It encourages continuous self-examination, enabling them to recognize how shared cultural backgrounds might influence interactions and interpretations. By engaging in practices such as reflective journaling and peer debriefing, researchers can identify moments of overfamiliarity or unconscious bias, ensuring that data collection remains rigorous and interpretations are grounded in participants' perspectives rather than preconceived notions. This process balances empathetic engagement with analytical distance, enhancing the validity and ethical integrity of the research.

Our interviews with the participants (both online and onsite) were semi-structured. With our focus on media consumption practices among immigrants (Schatzki, 2016), we are interested in the experiences of migrants as they try to build a relationship with and through digital and social media. Therefore, we mostly followed the conversation/discussion format (Kallio and Pietilä et al. 2016). As researchers exploring a community, we consider this method effective, enabling us to explore the subject without discomforting the participants. Digital media being our focus, our interviews/conversations went hand in hand with analyses of the social media posts to validate and verify the interview data (Shen and Bissell, 2013; Lai and To, 2015).

For content analyses, we referred to the past two years (2022-2024) of content of the Facebook groups mentioned earlier. The search items are directly linked to the what we call

[6] European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR: https://gdpr-info.eu/): Under the GDPR, each EU member state requires businesses to protect the personal data and privacy of EU citizens for transactions that occur within EU member states. Following the GDPR protocol, this project will also maintain data protection of the subjects through informed consent, voluntary participations, maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity, consideration of misuse of data.

the clusters of practices. We searched for the terms - food, and moved to religion and politics. We identified all contents related to these terms over the period of two years and analysed them with reference to the positionality of the participant posting the content, words chosen to be used in the content, number of engagements with the posts, the manner in which participants engaged with the posts, positionality of the participants and comparative presence and absence of posts related to particular food, religion or political worldviews.

Witnessing the field: Clusters of practices

Witnessing the field involves two types of data collection: interviews and content analyses. To understand how digital discords and digital othering in the transnational social fields help mimic the home-grown social inequalities in the diaspora, we look at the clusters of practices, including food, religious, and political practices, of the emerging Indian diaspora in Germany. Digital discords refers to the social media discourses on food, religion, and politics that the members of the diaspora engage with, unraveling the underlying tension among different religious communities, mostly between Hindus and non-Hindus over the clusters of practices. Digital othering refers to the manner in which non-Hindu that is, Muslim and Christian migrants from India feel invisible, discriminated against, and targeted in social media groups, including Facebook and WhatsApp.

Culinary practices

Media consumption around culinary practices must be located in the larger conversation on the eating habits of Indians within the binary of vegetarianism and meat eating. Sociological and anthropological literature on immigrant food practices has already argued in favor of how eating practices contribute to the construction of diaspora. In addition, the popular imagination of Indians outside India is based on the dominance of Hindu vegetarianism. Recent works (Mintz 2008, Mannur 2009; Black 2010,) have extensively engaged with how food practices are organized within the diaspora. In addition, in a diaspora that is still emerging and in its formative stages, information and questions regarding food are primary within a community dominated by young people in a quest to explore new food on the one hand and preserve traditions on the other. While young immigrants, in pursuit of new dreams in a new country, are motivated to experiment with local food and culture, they also carry the burden of socialization internalized at home, which may render several local food practices problematic. This dilemma is often reflected in the words of the participants in this study.

Tanu, a 20-something student in Munich, shared her impasse: "When I came to Berlin, I wanted to try the local food in Germany but soon realized that the popular cuisine in the Bayern region is mostly meat based whereas I only eat chicken. I was unsure what to try and not…I started asking for recommendations in the Facebook groups. I also don't drink. Now I do, just wine..but when I came, I was hardly used to this drinking-on-the-street habit, and it was quite a culture shock…. I expressed my surprise in the (Facebook) group and found that many other people felt the same. So I was relieved that I was not the only person feeling out of place…. There are many other Indians too…. After this, I decided to try only the food I know, and I also follow the group posts in detail. I do not want to experiment anymore…. Some of the members also shared that they mostly cook, as it s cheaper, especially as a student (sic)."

Home-cooked food is considered a safer option than exploring unfamiliar food that may contain meat. To learn more about this topic, we spoke to Ramya. Ramya, an IT consultant from Cologne, arrived in Germany in 2021. She lived alone and preferred home-cooked food. "I brought the basics from India. Because you know I thought Germany is like the US, where many Indians live here…. So, I brought some stuff. I am a vegetarian and enjoy eating simple home-cooked food. Therefore, I always buy things from the supermarket and make rotis at home. The problem started with the rotis. I bought flour from nearby markets, but the rotis were not like those in India. So, I started thinking that maybe I should buy the usual atta from an Indian supermarket. I asked in the (Facebook) group which brand of atta they buy here. Some told me to buy Indian brands that can be found in Indian groceries in Neumarkt. This was a huge help. I found that many people faced similar problems making roti with local brands of flour…. It was really helpful to find people who have similar food habits and connect with them. I mean, of course, one can look on the Internet to find supermarkets and all…but to know from people who have similar food habits about their own experiences is better. Therefore, I just ask for opinions in the group. This is really helpful because I also live alone, so if I have to discuss it, with whom should I do so? The groups are like support systems….". Ramya says as we ask the first question about her media consumption.

Conversations about Indian bread are widespread across these Facebook groups, often blurring regional divisions. Another participant, Usha Nalini from Tamil Nadu, now living in Berlin, shares: "I have had many conversations in the group about the perfect dosa batter. Also Rotis…..My husband is from Uttar Pradesh, and I am Tamil. Therefore, we eat both North Indian and South Indian food at home. My children love both things. Therefore, I wanted to buy a roti maker. Now, which one to buy and where to buy from…. Therefore, I always prefer to ask in the (WhatsApp and Facebook) groups. These groups are useful. You can share any questions you have with them. Sometimes people share important information, so I regularly read through the chats…."

A similar conversation arose when talking to Nitin, a Mechanical Engineering student based in Munich. "I mostly ask the groups for recommendations of different sorts. Which restaurant is good, which food to try….. You receive real-time feedback based on customer experience. This is more reliable than simply asking on the Internet. I wanted to buy a mixer grinder to crush the spices and garlic. like we do in India…it makes cooking superfast and easy, right? Therefore, I purchased one online, only to discover that it was unsuitable for grinding spices. It is great for juice, but not for spices, the way we use spices in cooking in India. I was like, now what do I do with this machine? I have already spent approximately 80€ on this! So, I asked in the (Facebook) group. One participant stated that Indian brands of mixer grinders are available in the country. That was a relief! I exchanged the earlier mixer for a coffee maker and bought a Maharaja mixie from the Indian supermarket. Interestingly, the man who recommended the Indian mixer to me turned out to be my neighbor, and we discovered that we live close by and shared several hobbies. We both play football. So we hang out sometimes also…it's a nice way of meeting new people…social media."

However, a conversation that begins with food does not always end in friendship, especially regarding migrants from India, a country where food is highly political and often divisive. One of the very few non-Hindu Indians active in these groups was Hamid. Hamid is a beef-eating Malayali Muslim, currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Political Science in the Cologne-Bonn area. He was ready to share his story with us and did so. "As a Political Scientist, I know how

Hindus usually have issues with beef. Not everybody, but generally. I wanted to attend a Kerala beef festival here. I wanted to know whether this occurs here. Therefore, I wrote in the Facebook group. One man started abusing me, saying that I should not post such questions in Indian groups because Indians do not eat beef. I corrected him that some Hindus from India do not eat beef and that I was not forcing anybody to eat beef by asking if more Malayalis from Kerala observe any such festivals in Germany.. So, where is the problem? I also asked this man that so many ask about other food-related questions then it is fine then what is the problem now – I am just asking for information…..Two more men joined, and another woman joined the conversation later and requested the Admin to remove the post. I was polite throughout the comments but I was surprised that the Admin actually removed the post, citing that no political conversation is allowed under the regulation of the group."

While the group description mentions that political discussions must be avoided, Hamid's Facebook post was not explicitly about politics. However, eating beef as a culinary practice is a highly sensitive and political question in India today, and the digital media backlash that Hamid experienced is a continuation of what is already witnessed in India onsite. There have been several incidents of mob lynching of people allegedly transporting beef in the northern regions of the country, catching global attention in relation to the everyday precarity of Muslims in India[7]. Hamid's case points to the digital manifestation of similar sentiments of aggression on-site in the diaspora. As a transnational social field, the diaspora, even at an emerging stage, is able to reproduce the home country's inequalities in the host country, exacerbated by social media.

What followed for Hamid started distancing himself from the Indian diaspora at large and started making friends with people from other countries and Germany. "Because I work at the university, it is a more cosmopolitan space. Therefore, I do not have to rely on Indians to survive in Germany. It is not that I do not like hanging out with other Indians, but if I am stereotyped or judged for being a beef-eating Muslim man, I am better off without such company." It is interesting to observe how Nitin's and Hamid's experiences can be located at the two ends of a binary resting on a framework of purity, othering, and Islamophobia.

Although we could not find Hamid's Facebook post since it was already taken down by the group admin, we found a similar post and comment threads posted by Usman Shahid. We contacted Usman and met him for a conversation about the incident. Usman arrived in Germany with a job-seeker visa and now works at Bosch Berlin. Usman posted a picture on the Facebook group of a beer glass he was drinking at a pub that he recommended others to visit. "Two men suddenly commented on my post taunting me that being a Muslim I should not be drinking. I ignored their comments initially, then of course, I defended myself. The Admin intervened and requested that the two men take down their comments and apologize. What I liked was that some other people came forward in my support – they wrote that such bullying must be stopped within the community."

Usman's experience differed from Hamid's because, unlike Hamid, Usman received support from other community members. As social media communities, these Facebook groups communicate between physical spaces and digital interactions among immigrants within the

[7] https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/10/5/the-lynching-that-changed-india

diaspora. Therefore, both division and inclusion inform how media consumption practices are organized within diasporas.

While WhatsApp and Facebook groups are crucial sites for such reproduction of home country practices in the diaspora, it is often more difficult to enter WhatsApp groups because they are controlled groups. In comparison, Facebook groups are open to larger memberships, although they too ask a few general questions before conferring the memberships. WhatsApp groups mostly run as private communication channels among some core members, from which the larger community is excluded. As researchers and cultural insiders, we approached several WhatsApp group admins (also the group Admins of the Facebook groups we are part of) to include us in the WhatsApp groups but were unsuccessful in most cases, in which the standard reply was, "whatever relevant information is to be shared, we always announce them in the Facebook groups. WhatsApp group is only for the volunteers who work closely during festivals….". Second, on several occasions during the interviews, the participants refused to include us in the WhatsApp groups, as promised at the beginning of the interviews. There are some other WhatsApp groups that are less territorial and more inclusive; however, they have a specific purpose: they want to sell us their merchandise. As observed, most of these WhatsApp groups are mostly dormant, relinquishing their slumbers only during popular Hindu festivals.

Religious practices

To investigate media consumption around religious practices among Indian migrants in Germany, we analyzed the Facebook groups of Indians in Berlin, Bengalis in Berlin, and Indians in Germany. Through the interviews and content analyses, it was observed that the religious practices are largely restricted to Hindu festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, Holi, Shiva Ratri, Durga Puja, and Dussehra. India, with a majoritarian worldview coupled with anti-minority sentiments.

Within the framework of everyday practices, most of the conversations on the Facebook groups revolve around which temple is closest to the city center, which temple is the most active, which is family- and child-friendly, and which temple charges the least for attending festivals. Most of the time, these physical premises are the location of entertainment and relaxation. Elina Chawla, a mother of two located in Berlin, said, "I run a WhatsApp group where I share all information regarding visiting the temple. Right now, the Ganesh temple in Neukölln is the most popular…all festivals are celebrated there. Therefore, I regularly share information about that on the (WhatsApp) group. I also organize Karwa Chauth celebrations at my home. Women like to buy jewelry from me. I also sell Indian ethnic clothing. I bring them in bulk from India."

While most Hindu festivals are widely discussed on Facebook and WhatsApp groups, there is little reference to Islamic, Buddhist, and Christian festivals among Indians. Sara, a kindergarten teacher in Frankfurt, told us: "I am Christian. I am not really a practicing Christian like I do not go to the Church every Sunday or anything, but I like to meet my clan sometimes, during Christmas for example…but I rarely find much discussion on such topics in the (Facebook) groups. What I do is I go to the nearby church. In the NRW region, there are many Churches where Indians go …in my church, there are not too many, but I go only during Christmas. So it's fine. Although I wish to find an Indian community active in Church activities…'

We tried to verify Sara's statement vis-à-vis the Facebook group she referred to and found posts only on Christmas greetings. Although we found enthusiastic responses to those greetings from people within the community, nothing significant beyond that. Additionally, between 2012 and 2022, we found 12 posts from Indian Christians asking for information regarding community activities among Indians during Good Friday and Sunday mass with little engagement and follow-up comments by other group members. In contrast, within the same time frame, we found 978 posts on Hindu festivals on the same Facebook group, followed by significant engagements, comments, and "likes" from other group members, most of whom had Hindu names. While we found nothing offensive about Christians and Christianity, the fewer posts in contrast to Hindu festivals remain significant by their absence.

It is also interesting to note that while Indian Hindus have their own temples and utilize those spaces for celebrating in their own way, making information about such festivals widespread across social media, Indian Christians are expected to visit local churches. Neither the Facebook and WhatsApp group admins nor the group members, in general, feel the need to explain why such social media platforms disseminate information only on Hindu festivals and why Indians in Germany do not feel the necessity to celebrate non-Hindu religions within the diaspora.

If Christians are absent through neglect, Muslims are non-existent through othering. Unlike Facebook/WhatsApp posts on greetings during Christian festivals, Muslim festivals find almost no place on social media platforms. Between 2012 and 2022, we found three Facebook posts on Eid greetings, and none of them were released by the group admins. Two of the three posts had group member engagements – insignificant and essentially from Muslims. No Hindu group members commented on these posts. When asked, the group Admin (based in Cologne) responded: "Muslims mostly go to the big Mosque in Ehrenfeld. Now, they are allowed to read Namaaz through the microphone. What else! They were in the right place at the right time; what more can I say? Muslims do not mix with us. They mix with Pakistanis or Turkish people. It is not that we do not want them, but they do not want us to want them. You find no Facebook posts simply because they never interact with us. They stay separate….what can we do!"

The repetition of "they" and "us" in the statement emphasizes the underlying tension, tacit othering, and mysterious distancing that locates Muslims at the other end of the spectrum within the diaspora. When linked back to the status of food-related questions and concomitant backlash, it is not difficult to understand the steps of othering, its backstory emanating from the home country, and the general reflection on social media groups and their consumption.

Nizmi Suhail, an MBA student in Frankfurt, validated this situation. She arrived in Germany two years ago and lives with her partner. Our conversation with her opened a new window of exploration for us, which was hitherto unknown. "I mostly ask in the Bangladesh group. There is a growing population of Bangladeshi students and corporate employees in the area, and I have no idea if you are studying them too…. However, they are also becoming active on social media. They have Facebook groups I am in the group and whatever question I have…food, grocery, job, paperwork, whatever… Eid, mosque – I just ask there. Indian groups are not always very friendly, and they do not share or are not interested in information regarding Muslim culture. The Bangladesh groups suit me that way. Although I do not understand Bengali, most of the posts are in English, and if I write a question in English,

people answer in English too. See…most of these groups are run by young people, so English is the language we mostly use."

Nizmi helped us make two observations. First, there is a steady growth of young people from Bangladesh in German universities and the German job market. While we were aware of this trend, we were not certain of their growing engagement in social media that often covers beyond their cartographic diaspora and includes neighbors with identifiable characteristics – in this case, Islam. Second, we were not aware that Indian Muslims feel so outcasted within the Indian diaspora, similar to the situation in India, where they find shelter among Muslims from other countries.

We asked other Muslim participants about their experiences with FGM. Neha M. from Lucknow and Riyaz from West Bengal had similar opinions. As Neha shared, "At work I hang out with Indians and from other countries too, most of the Indians are Hindus, it is fine when we go for dinner, or go to the Christmas market before holidays, etc. However, during Eid and other festivals, my Indian colleagues were not interested in my religion. However, they are happy to eat Biryani when I bring it to the office. I understand that there is a certain line. I do not follow social media very much, but during Eid this time, I went to a friend's place who is also a Muslim from Pakistan, and we celebrated. There are a few Indians too…Muslims. It was nice. We have a small WhatsApp group with just a few of us because we feel that the Indian groups are not useful. Once one friend wrote something about how Muharram is not a happy occasion for Muslims because someone wished happy Muharram in the (Facebook) group and then people started telling her how Indians would know so much about Muharram …just imagine! Why would Indians not know about Muharram? Anyway, we did not want to argue with anyone…."

Online discussions on WhatsApp and Facebook groups on religious practices within the diaspora are similar to onsite conditions, where non-Hindu festivals and rituals are visibly at the periphery. Whether with reference to visiting Mosques or the Churches or discussing festivities, the Indian diaspora, as observed in this study, is Hindu-dominated. It is not an aberration that Hindu Indian migrants outnumber Muslims and Christians, as Hindus are a numerical majority in their home country. However, what is striking is the manner in which non-Hindu migrants in the diaspora are invisibilized. These tendencies are deeply informed by communal conflicts in India (Devji 1992). It is also noteworthy that while media consumption around culinary practices could camouflage the internal tension within the diaspora, experiences, and social media posts on religious practices have left the conflict bare. Based on this, it can be further observed that the most significant division within the Indian diaspora in Germany, as it emerges in this study, is religion. This trend is even more pronounced with respect to political practices.

Political practices

To locate the political practices of Indians in Germany, we chose the latest appearance of the Indian Prime Minister in Berlin in April 2022 as our case in point. We identified two exceptionally active groups during this period: Indians in Berlin (the group we already mentioned earlier in this paper) and Go Back Modi. We deliberately chose these two binary Facebook groups since both were highly engaging during the arrival of the current Indian Prime Minister in Berlin, although their ideologies, actions, and practices were in contrast to each other. Go Back Modi, a Facebook page, was created in 2019. In comparison to Indians

in Berlin, this is new. It is an open forum, meaning it serves as a public sphere, unlike the Indians in Berlin Facebook group. As a public sphere, its membership is open beyond count. Therefore, instead of members, it has approximately five thousand followers. It is categorized under "political organization" with multiple admins. From that standpoint, the Go Back Modi Facebook page is structurally and ideologically different from Indians in Berlin. In contrast, Indians in Berlin have one Admin. However, like Go Back Modi, Indians in Berlin has a political ideology clearly reflected in their group description: pro-nationalist platform for Indians in Berlin". However, unlike Go Back Modi, which does not specify its politics, this Facebook group is explicit about its political stance.

In the run-up to the prime minister's arrival, we identified several posts by Indians in Berlin where members showed interest in meeting Modi; the Admin shared information regarding acquiring free passes and paid entry tickets for the meetings, details on how to reach the venue, the protocol around it, etc. While Go Back Modi shared similar information about the prime minister's schedule in Berlin, the purpose differed. Go Back Modi as a political platform, mainly served as the dissenting voice of Indians opposing Modi and his regime in the home country. Consequently, as a Facebook page, Go Back Modi disseminated information relevant for the protestors to gather in front of the meeting venue and peacefully carry out their demonstrations. Shabana, one of the protest organizers, spoke to us before the meeting. "Go Back Modi is a significant platform to gather people, we plan to go live with our protests against the NRC…there are several agendas that we want to bring to the prime minister's attention. If we are able to go live via the Facebook page, not only people in Berlin but also those in other countries and India will be able to join us in spirit. We could not keep the momentum of the protests here or in India…due to the pandemic…. However, we would like this to happen now. We are ready." Although neither the Go Back Modi Facebook page nor the onsite protests during Modi's visit to Berlin received much attention from mainstream media in India or worldwide, it remains an interesting example of how online campaigns can effectively motivate members of the diaspora to gather and protest, simultaneously capturing the attention of the comrades across transnational digital media.

Although loosely bound, Go Back Modi is popular among Indian Muslims, including other religious minorities; people from the southern part of India, especially Tamil Nadu and Kerala; and the LGBTQ + communities. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Hamid, the Indian Muslim who was verbally abused on the Facebook group dominated by Indian Hindus, was one of the protestors representing Go Back Modi. As a counter platform to Go Back Modi, or perhaps the platform of Indians welcoming Modi in Berlin, Indians in Berlin is highly critical of dissenters and protesters. We spoke with Mihir, one of the page's moderators and learned the following: "The Prime Minister's visit was a grand success. We used a Facebook page to share information. Indians even came from other cities following our information, and we were able to get most of them to attend the gathering. You can see the photos in the group – we also advertised it well and later posted all pictures so that people in India will also feel that even when we are outside the country, we are Indians, and our children most importantly need to learn Indian culture, so we are happy that we could organize this. Many of our children performed, all pictures are posted on the Facebook group…see it!"

Notably, Mihir mentions Indian culture while talking about the prime minister, essentially a political head of the state. Following his repeated suggestions, we checked the pictures on the Facebook group and found that children performed Hindu devotional songs. We reckon this

must be the cultural reference Mihir drew our attention to. He shared another interesting piece of information: after the event with the Prime Minister, followed by a photo-op, the Indians attending the event gathered at a nearby restaurant to enjoy a four-course dinner. He further added, "We wanted to enjoy the time overall. Therefore, we booked the entire restaurant for that evening and planned an authentic Indian menu." What did he mean by authentic? "Pure desi ghee walah North Indian vegetarian menu. This is what we eat at home, back in India, this is what we are trying to teach our children too, not to forget our culture."

Consistent reference to Hindu and vegetarian, both online and onsite, during the prime minister's visit to Germany must be put in context. This is linked to the political ideology of the Hindu nationalism of the sitting government in India (Basu and Datta 2023) and the concomitant imposition of vegetarianism in the country (Kikon 2022). While a significant portion of the Indian population eats meat, there is a strong sentiment of vegetarianism championed and imposed by the non-meat-eating Hindu population in the country, often with state endorsements[8] (Chacko 2019). In light of this, a diasporic place-making based on Hindu imposition is observed in the study, which lends support to the religious division mentioned earlier. Second, political practices of dissent through Facebook groups, such as Go Back Modi, emerge as counter-voices to the dominant nationalistic platforms, such as the Indians in Berlin Facebook group. While such voices of what we call "digital dissenting" are nodal points to examine how "digital othering" works in the diaspora, these social media platforms struggle to maintain their social media presence and momentum because the numerical majority in the diaspora, like those in the home country, are Hindu migrants with nationalistic worldviews.

Conclusion

While the examination of the Facebook and WhatsApp groups brings us to the online transnational social field where the migrants negotiate their culinary, political, and religious practices, our research participants in this study exhibit stronger visibility and domination of Hindus and Hindu majoritarian practices as opposed to other religious communities like the Indian Muslims or the Indian Christians who are also considered minorities in India. These practices inform the construction and imagination of home through the exacerbation of digital media consumption within the diaspora. We find that culinary practices are guided by food politics in India, built on the criminalization of beef eating. Our fieldwork also reveals that only Hindu practices of rituals, festivals, and religion enjoy visibility and participation within the diaspora, while Christians are conspicuous by their absence, and Muslims identify more with immigrants from Bangladesh. Consequently, we argue that the clusters of practices embedded in the social media practices of Indians in Germany is dominated by Hindu majoritarianism, coupled with a systematic othering of Muslims and the invisibility of other religions, such as Christianity. We also observe that while caste is still not a dominant discourse in the framework of digital discords and digital othering, vegetarianism as a good practice of Hindu Indians points to the potential fragmentation and faultline in the diaspora in the future (Mehta & Belk 1991; Kurien 2001 et al.).

Diaspora fragmentation is not a new phenomenon. Therwath (2007) showed how Islamophobia works in the tech-migrant-based Indian diaspora in the USA. The emergence

---

[8] In states like Uttar Pradesh, meat shops are shut by the state government during Hindu festivals. In states like Gujarat, buying and selling of meat is prohibited by law.

of a Hindu-dominated Indian diaspora is upheld in the manner in which the people of Hindu origin have eventually established themselves in the political landscape of the USA, among other platforms in the immigrant country. On the other hand, several studies on intersectionality in the Indian diaspora in the USA address caste practices in the diaspora as a major social divide, similar to those practiced in India (Purakayastha 2012). Recently, Sanam Roohi (2017) has pointed out that there are informal scopes of upper mobility in the corporations in which upper caste employees are favored by their upper caste bosses to climb the ladder and reach executive and decision-making positions. While these studies help us establish the background and compare the emerging Indian diaspora in Germany with other Indian communities outside India, in this study, we observe that the continuity and reproduction of such structures of social inequality are facilitated by social media usage, and a systematic tracing and examination of the social media practices can help us understand the role of social media as an enabler of home-grown social inequalities, prejudices, and discrimination in the diaspora.

Through this paper, our effort is to make a theoretical contribution to the ongoing debate on digital nationalism with the intervention of the clusters of practices played out at transnational levels by the immigrants. The clusters of practices are indicative of the internal conflicts among the immigrants that their social media consumption practices expose. To this end, we argue that the role of social media in the transnational social field is critically illuminated through the concepts of "digital othering" and "digital discord," which serve as key mechanisms by which diasporic communities experience and reproduce social divisions. Digital othering refers to the process by which individuals or groups within the diaspora are marginalized, excluded, or constructed as "others" through online interactions and representations. This phenomenon manifests in the replication of communal boundaries and prejudices that are originally rooted in the home country but are now mediated and intensified through digital platforms. Digital discord, on the other hand, encompasses the conflicts, tensions, and antagonisms that arise within these online diasporic spaces, often mirroring the sectarian, ethnic, or religious disputes prevalent in the country of origin.

These practices emerge from a cluster of transnational social media consumption behaviours that involve selective engagement with content, identity performances, and the circulation of politically and socially charged narratives. Social media's immediacy and reach accelerate the transmission of social biases, enabling diasporic individuals to maintain affective and ideological ties to homeland conflicts. Consequently, digital othering and discords are not isolated phenomena but are embedded within broader patterns of transnational communication, where social media acts as a conduit for transporting and transforming social inequalities and communal antagonisms from India to diaspora settings.

The Indian diaspora in Germany exemplifies how these digital practices contribute to the formation of a fragmented diaspora and mimic the home-grown inequalities in the diaspora. As a community still in the process of consolidation, the diaspora's social cohesion is challenged by the rapid dissemination of divisive content and the reproduction of home-country conflicts in digital spaces. This leads to the construction of multiple, often competing, diasporic identities that are shaped by the digital mediation of social othering and discord.

Using digital nationalism as a theoretical framework helps situate these phenomena within the broader dynamics of nationhood, identity, and belonging in the digital age. Digital nationalism

provides a lens to understand how digital othering and discords function as expressions of nationalist ideologies that transcend geographic boundaries, shaping diasporic social fields. Within this framework, digital nationalism reveals how online diasporic communities become sites where nationalist discourses are reproduced, contested, and negotiated, often leading to the exclusion or marginalization of minority groups within the diaspora. Thus, digital nationalism allows us to locate digital discords and digital othering not merely as isolated social media phenomena but as integral components of transnational nationalist projects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: We thank Isha Muktyar for her contribution to the initial stage of data collection.

DECLARATION: The authors have no conflict of interest.

References

Anderson, B. (2019). New directions in migration studies: towards methodological de-nationalism. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *7*(1), 1-13.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization* (Vol. 1). U of Minnesota Press.

Basu, A., & Datta, A. (2023). Saffronization of a Land: Is it possible to separate Hinduism from Hindutva in India?. *Transcience: A Journal of Global Studies*, *14*(1).

Basu, A. (2025). Understanding Propaganda: A Study of Media in Contemporary India. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.

Black, S. (2010). Recipes for cosmopolitanism: cooking across borders in the South Asian diaspora. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, *31*(1), 1-30.

Brayboy, B. M., & Deyhle, D. (2000). Insider-outsider: researchers in American Indian communities. *Theory into practice*, *39*(3), 163-169.

Brouwer, L. (2004). Dutch-Muslims on the internet: a new discussion platform. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *24*(1), 47-55.

Chacko, P. (2019). Marketizing Hindutva: The state, society, and markets in Hindu nationalism. *Modern Asian Studies*, *53*(2), 377-410.

Cunningham, S. (2001). Popular media as public 'sphericules' for diasporic communities. *International journal of cultural studies*, *4*(2), 131-147.

Datta, A. (2023). *Stories of the Indian Immigrant Communities in Germany: Why Move?*. Springer Nature.

Datta, A., & Basu, A. (2023). Do the Kerala nurses in Germany break the myth of migration as a male-space?. *Migration and Diversity*, *2*(3), 299-309.

Devji, F. F. (1992). Hindu/Muslim/Indian. *Public Culture*, *5*(1), 1-18.

Goel, U. (2007). Indians in Germany. The imagination of a community. *UNEAC Asia Papers*, *20*(2007), 1-8.

Hiller, H. H., & Franz, T. M. (2004). New ties, old ties and lost ties: the use of the internet in diaspora. *New media & society*, *6*(6), 731-752.

Hopkins, L. (2008). Young Turks and new media: the construction of identity in an age of Islamophobia. *Media International Australia*, *126*(1), 54-66.

Jayaram, N. (2009). The study of Indian Diaspora. *Sociology and Social Anthropology in India*, 392-445.

Johnson, M., & Barlow, R. (2021). Defining the phygital marketing advantage. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, *16*(6), 2365-2385.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of advanced nursing*, *72*(12), 2954-2965.

Karim, K. H. (1998). *From ethnic media to global media: Transnational communication networks among diasporic communities*. University of Oxford. Transnational Communities Programme.

Karim, K. H. (Ed.). (2003). *The media of diaspora* (Vol. 7). London: Routledge.

Kikon, D. (2022). Dirty food: racism and casteism in India. In *Rethinking Difference in India Through Racialization* (pp. 86-105). Routledge.

Kurien, P. (2001). Religion, ethnicity and politics: Hindu and Muslim Indian immigrants in the United States. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *24*(2), 263-293.

Lai, L. S., & To, W. M. (2015). Content analysis of social media: A grounded theory approach. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, *16*(2), 138.

Madianou, M., & Miller, D. (2011). Crafting love: Letters and cassette tapes in transnational Filipino family communication. *South East Asia Research*, *19*(2), 249-272.

Mallapragada, M. (2006). Home, homeland, homepage: belonging and the Indian-American web. *New Media & Society*, *8*(2), 207-227.

Mannur, A. (2009). *Culinary fictions: Food in South Asian diasporic culture*. Temple University Press.

Mehta, R., & Belk, R. W. (1991). Artifacts, identity, and transition: Favorite possessions of Indians and Indian immigrants to the United States. *Journal of consumer Research*, *17*(4), 398-411.

Mihelj, S., & Jiménez-Martínez, C. (2021). Digital nationalism: Understanding the role of digital media in the rise of 'new'nationalism. *Nations and nationalism*, *27*(2), 331-346.

Mintz, S. (2008). Food and diaspora. *Food, Culture & Society*, *11*(4), 509-523.

Mustafa, M., & Chen, S. (2010). The strength of family networks in transnational immigrant entrepreneurship. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *52*(2), 97-106.

Parham, A. A. (2005). Internet, place, and public sphere in diaspora communities. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, *14*(2-3), 349-380.

Purkayastha, B. (2012). Intersectionality in a transnational world. *Gender & Society*, *26*(1), 55-66.

Roohi, S. (2017). Caste, kinship and the realisation of 'American Dream': High-skilled Telugu migrants in the USA. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *43*(16), 2756-2770.

Schatzki, T. (2016). Practice theory as flat ontology. In *Practice theory and research* (pp. 44-58). Routledge.

Shen, B., & Bissell, K. (2013). Social media, social me: A content analysis of beauty companies' use of Facebook in marketing and branding. *Journal of Promotion Management*, *19*(5), 629-651.

Shinozaki, K. (2012). Transnational dynamics in researching migrants: Self-reflexivity and boundary-drawing in fieldwork. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *35*(10), 1810-1827.

Skaria, Pandian and Mayaram (2005). Muslims, Dalits, and the Fabrications of History. Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal Publisher.

Skop, E., & Adams, P. C. (2009). Creating and inhabiting virtual places: Indian immigrants in cyberspace. *National Identities*, *11*(2), 127-147.

Taylor, J. (2011). The intimate insider: Negotiating the ethics of friendship when doing insider research. *Qualitative research*, *11*(1), 3-22.

Therwath, I. (2007). Working for India or against Islam? Islamophobia in Indian American Lobbies. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, (1).

Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *22*(2), 447-462.