

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DEFINING THE INDIAN IMMIGRANT VOICE

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OVERVIEW

Indians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in America. Although they only make up about 1% of the population, the larger community has been celebrated as a “model minority” (Sanjoy Chakravorty et al., 2019). There have been several journalistic accounts of both the professional and entrepreneurial accomplishments of Indians. However, the presence of marginalized subcultures within the larger Indian community have received little attention. These subcultures have neither garnered the interest of social justice movements nor been included in the media’s account of anti-immigrant sentiment. The dangers of this invisibility and its deeper effects are now being reflected in the rise of undocumented Indian youth (Kably, 2020). A comprehensive account of the emerging Indian immigrant youth, the life and work of their families, and the increasing threat of deportation and family separation the group faces is central to developing an integrated identity of Indians in America (Bhattacharya, 2018).

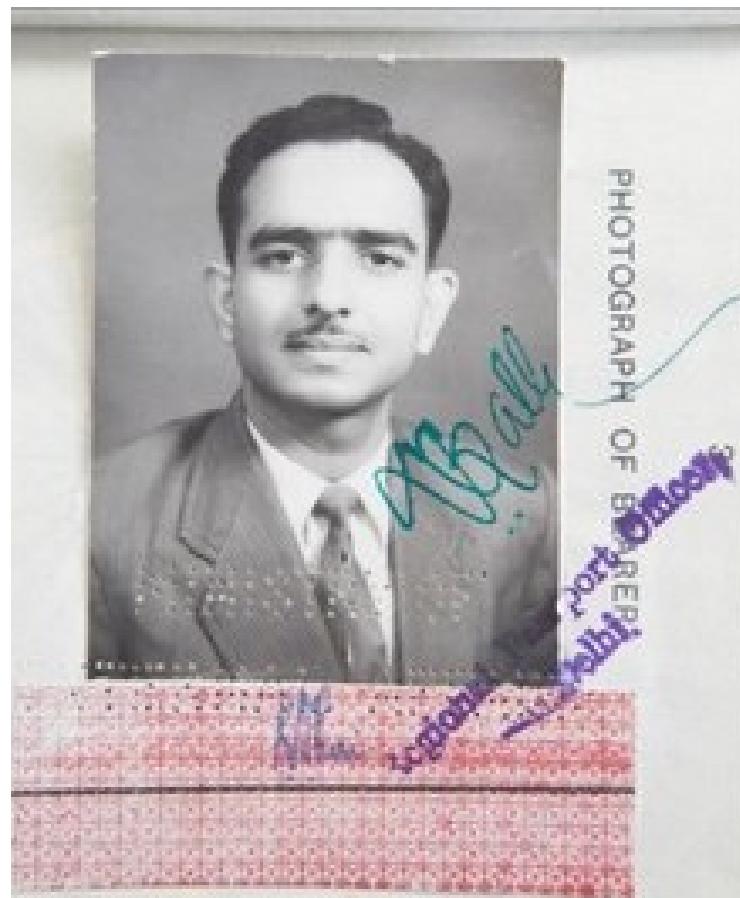
Rather than see “Indian” as a homogeneous community to be placed in the American racial system,

this community media report aims to discuss the dynamics and differences of undocumented Indian youth in order to spark national conversation and journalistic engagement in mainstream media.

Specifically, this report will focus on the use of participatory media as a community building tool (Coyer et al., 2007). Alicia Richardson's book *Bearing Witness While Black*, provided an auto ethnographic account of Black activist who used mobile phones, and social media to create their own news outlets and challenge long standing narratives about race, power, and privilege in America (Richardson, 2020). This report builds on her work, in order to identify how Indian immigrant youth can also assume the role of news creators (Lopez et al., n.d.). This will enable them to set their own community agenda, address gaps in news coverage, and improve journalistic engagements .

HISTORY OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION

In 1990, Congress created the H-1B category to allow employers to bring educated and specialized foreign workers to fill labor shortages in STEM (Ruiz et al., 2012, p. 2). An H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that would allow employers to hire highly skilled Bachelors or Master's degree holders for a duration of three years with the possibility of extension (American Immigration Council, 2016). Over the last twenty years, migrants largely from India, China, and the Philippines have come to America legally through the H-1B program (Bier, 2019, p. 6). Given the long duration of their employment, workers have also brought over their families, attempting to integrate their family units, and raise their children with American ideals. The increasing labor demands from American companies are resulting in employers applying for a Labor Condition Application (LCA) and extending the employment of their H-1B visa workers (Ruiz et al., 2012, p. 3). The LCA is the first step in integrating the H-1B immigrant population. While this process puts H-1B workers on a pathway to permanent residency, workers are finding that wait times to submit their green card application is over a decade (Bier, 2019, p. 13). The unintended consequence of this prolonged wait time is that children of H-1B families are being aged-out of the green card application.



Specific immigration opportunities are reserved for "children" defined by the immigration code as those who are under twenty-one years of age (Lee, 2019, p. 2342). Since the immigration process can take so long, children who were eligible for a visa at the start of the process may not be at the end when the visa actually becomes available. Hence the role of time in becoming eligible for a visa has endangered the immigration status of Indian immigrant youth. While policies like Child Status Protection Act (CSPA) attempts to remedy this by extending the visa conversion times for aged-out children, the children of H-1B visa applicants from high traffic countries like India, China and the Philippines are not protected under CSPA (Kably, 2020). As a result these children, many of whom have settled and grown up in America, are having to self-deport and face family separation.

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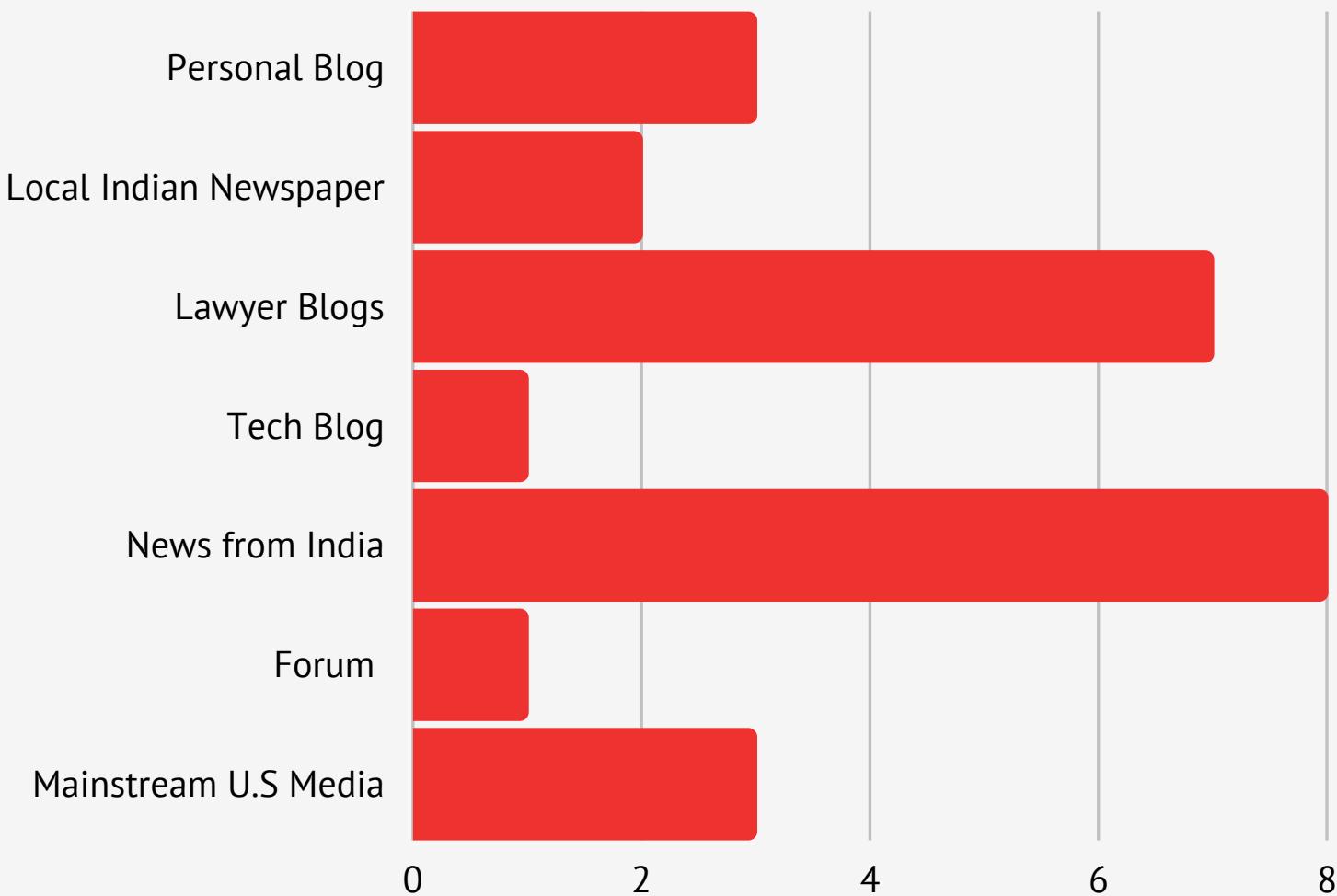
Only 3 news outlets: Forbes, New York Times and CNBC18 covered any news about Indian undocumented youth

NUMBER OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA NETWORKS COVERAGE OF AGING OUT IMMIGRANT YOUTH

After analyzing 25 articles from the first three pages of a Google Search for "Undocumented Indian Immigrant Youth" we found that there was limited mainstream media coverage of the issue.

SOURCE OF NEWS COVERAGE

Through a survey of published articles, it is evident that news media from India is the largest producer of content related to the legal and policy implications for undocumented immigrant youth. A close second immigration attorneys in the U.S. This points to further evidence that undocumented Indian youth are largely unaccounted in mainstream media.



COMMUNITY MEDIA AUDIT

Community Media defined by Dowmunt and Coyer are media forms that work on a smaller scale, are less constrained by bureaucracy or commercial interests, and often even stand in opposition to them (Coyer et al., 2007)



Women in Backlog

@forovvyaa

Master Graduate - Lived more than a decade in America
choice career or family

📍 Illinois 📅 Joined July 2018

152 Following 318 Followers

Green Card Backlog Coalition

@GCBCoalition

We are a coalition of individuals stuck in the employment green card backlog advocating to pass the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act - H.R.1044 / S.386.

🔗 congress.gov/bill/116th-con... 📅 Joined January 2020

511 Following 5,387 Followers

Legal Immigrant

@F1qdl5EEE8QjsO3

Views, opinions, solely mine, no implicit/explicit endorsement by employer/others.
RTs!=endorsements

📅 Joined March 2020

5 Following 195 Followers



Vijay Thakur

@VijayThakur2121

MS in Electrical Engineering from Georgia Tech.
Cheap Imported Labor.
RTs not endorsements.

The screenshots on this page refer to twitter accounts that are sharing information and advocating for a bill [#PassHR1044](#) and [#S386](#).

These bills would remove country of birth quotes in the American immigration system and reduce long wait times for H1-B Indian immigrants in America. Ultimately, this change will reduce the number of kids that "age-out" and have to self-deport. While, these accounts are a starting point, the personal perspectives from Indian immigrant youth themselves is still missing.

Youth led community media outlet like @Team_Enough is an intersectional youth movement focused on gun violence (Trageser, 2020) is an example of how Indian undocumented immigrants facing tragedy into action by taking immigration reform in a disruptive way.

CREATING A PUBLIC SPHERE

A public sphere is a space where people come together to gather and discuss matters of political significance and ultimately influence political action. Below are three examples of public spheres (Richardson, 2020)

01 **Enclave**

a safe space hidden from the view of the oppressor

02 **Counterpublic**

creates coalitions with other marginalized groups to foster resistance and persuade outsiders to change their views

03 **Satellite**

does not concern itself with dominant public sphere



By sharing their own stories, realities and lived experiences Indian immigrant youth can build a counterpublic, that garners support and challenges news narratives that ignore them.

ESTABLISHING A COUNTER NARRATIVE

Through the use of social media platform like Twitter, Instagram and Tiktok Indian immigrant subculture can create and distribute their own counter narrative (Richardson, 2020). Below are examples of hashtags, memes, social media posts that serve as examples to that moreaccurate reflect true lived experiences.

#PERPETUALFORIGNER

The **#PerpetualForeigner** hashtag creates a space where the Indian-immigrant subculture can challenge the assimilation/proximity to whiteness fantasy (Muffuletto, 2018). Seeing that regardless of how many generations pass, by virtue of skin color, and ethnicity immigrant groups are always seen as foreigners could help us move beyond the model minority.

#H4UNDOCUMENTED

The **#H4Undocumented** hashtag can serve as a space to curate articles, and information about political movements in relation to immigration reform for the subculture. This would urge more people to join the movement for reform and share these stories.

#LEGALYETDEPORTED

The **#LegalyetDeported** hashtag can create a space where undocumented immigrant youth can stay anonymous, while building community in order to share and compare their immigration challenges and humanize their journeys

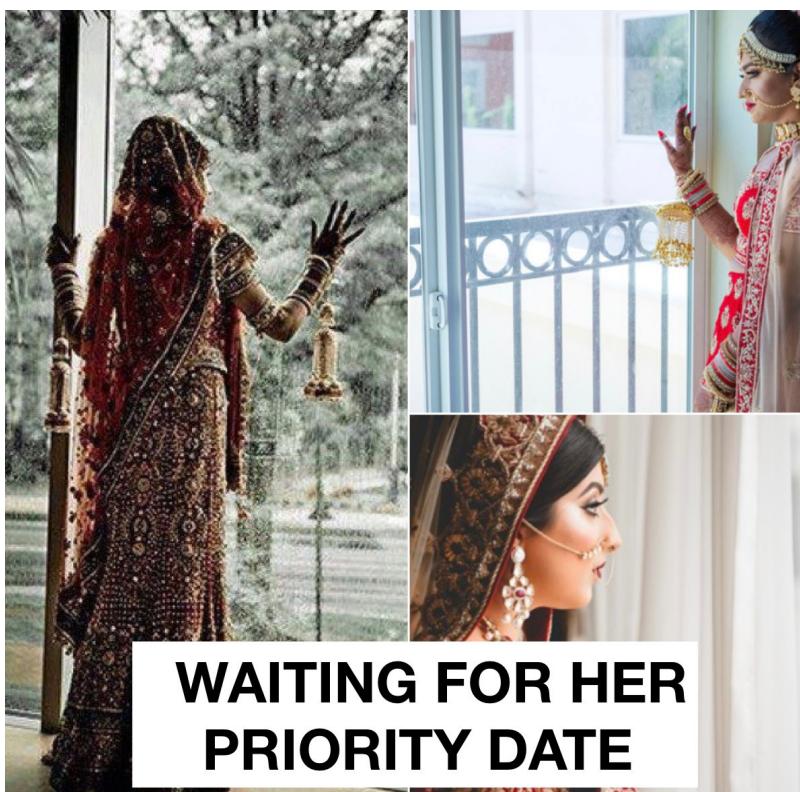
MEMES

YOU CAN BE ANYTHING YOU WANT TO BE IN AMERICA



ENGINEER, DOCTOR, ENGINEER

This photograph is from a popular Indian British diaspora movie, *Bend it Like Beckham*, the image of the mother pointing is commonly circulated as the "angry Indian aunty" meme. In this context it is meant to show that in America if Indian immigrant youth want to remain in the country legally they have to go into STEM fields. Alluding to the fact that perhaps the cultural expectation of engineer and doctors comes from a survival mechanism.



This is a collage of a common Indian bridal photoshoot image. It captures the bride waiting for the groom to arrive. In this context the image alludes to Indian women who are the spouse of an H1-B holder in the US. They spend years waiting for a priority date that allows them to finally work in America.



The meme to your left is meant to contrast the mainstream depiction of Indian immigrants as the "model minority" with the stark realities of Indian immigrant youth who are spent most of their life in a country which is threatening to kick them out at 21. This is an example of news framing that illustrates how gatekeepers continue to reproduce stereotypes that often exclude the marginalized subcultures within a larger community.

The image below is meant to inform the larger public of what long wait times look like. Kanush's examples illustrates how ridiculous the immigration system can be towards immigrants.

KANUSH SETHIA
AGE: 13
8TH GRADER

✓ H4 Visa
✓ EB Green Card

LEGALLY CAME TO AMERICA WHEN HE WAS 11
MONTHS WILL NOT BE AMERICAN UNTIL HE'S 83

A portrait of a young boy with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark jacket, is positioned on the right side of the frame. On the left, there is text describing his immigration status. Two checkmarks are listed: 'H4 Visa' and 'EB Green Card'. Below this, a large, bold text box contains the statement 'LEGALLY CAME TO AMERICA WHEN HE WAS 11' and 'MONTHS WILL NOT BE AMERICAN UNTIL HE'S 83'.

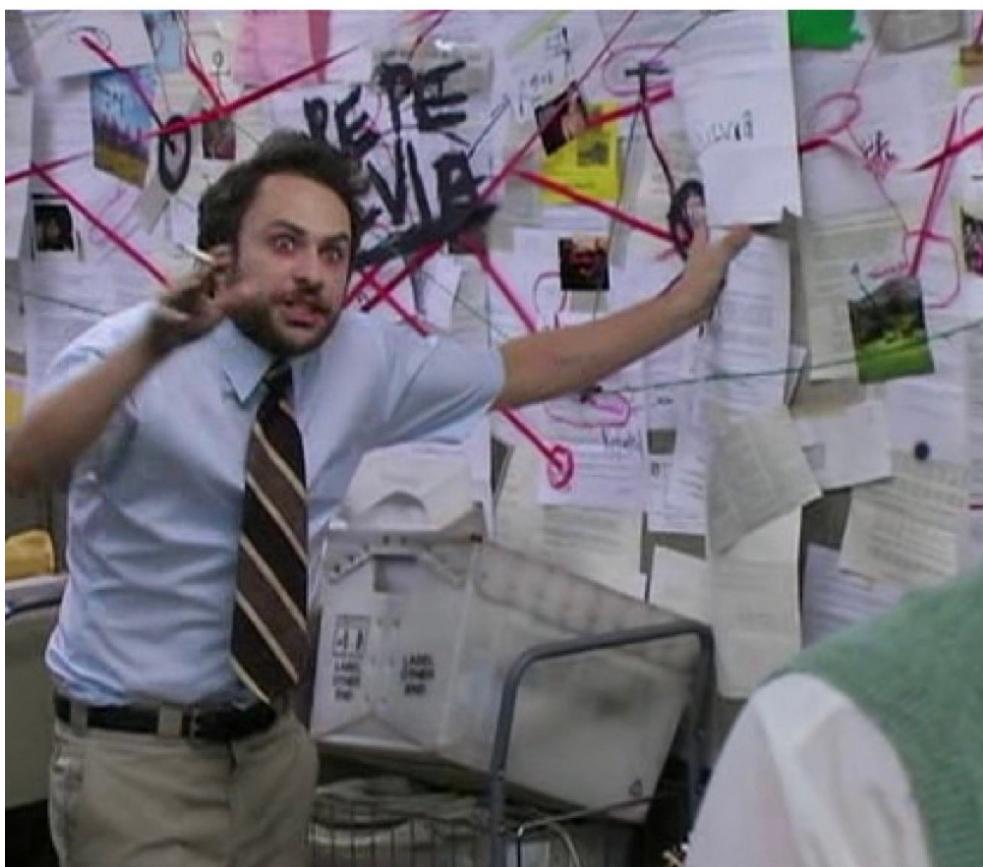
USCIS after realizing more than 86,000 Asian-Indian youth will “age-out” of their H4 visa status, face deportation and remain separated from their families.



Immigrants: How do we get on a path to citizenship ?

The meme of Sandra Bullock in *Birdbox* is meant to illustrate how (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) USCIS remains silent and blind to the issues facing these children. This is really meant to speak to an enclave that is familiar with what is happening with specific immigration issues pertaining to immigrant communities .

USCIS:



Another popular meme from *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* that is meant to highlight the overly complex and confusing immigration system in America. It's meant to be critical of policy and practice and serve as a reminder that immigration is a serious issue that is going to have major impacts on Americans in the coming years.

FINAL THOUGHTS

UNDERSTANDING RISKS AND CHOOSING TO MOVE FORWARD ANYWAY

When using social media it is important to note that the platform exercise censorship and surveillance (Richardson, 2020). When creating content to counter hegemonic narratives it's important to be aware that it may be received as a challenge to authority. The use of full names, geotagging can make undocumented populations especially susceptible. While these risks are real and harmful, it's important to note that those within the subculture who want to tell clear and accurate stories are essential. Their voices can help combat false narratives, and create change reflected in public policy.

WHY? ...BECAUSE SOMETIMES AMERICA FORGETS SHE'S AMERICAN TOO



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