

# RE-IMAGINING SOCIAL MEDIA





# ENOUGH!



## POV MUMBAI

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## QUICKSAND STUDIO

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## CONTENTS

01: Executive Summary

02: Workshop Structure & Demographics

03: Thematic Analysis

04: Key Ideas & Wireframes

05: Conclusion

## SECTION 01

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Across four workshops in Bangalore, Goa, Mumbai, and Delhi, a total of 92 participants engaged in consultations to re-imagine social media.



A striking consensus emerged: while social media offers vital tools for connection, community-building, and professional growth, its **current form** is overwhelmingly associated with **negative experiences.**

Dominant themes included severe mental health impacts (anxiety, addiction, exhaustion), significant safety concerns (harassment, trolling, stalking, doxxing), and a profound loss of user agency to opaque, profit-driven algorithms.

Participants collaboratively designed solutions centered on a fundamental power shift back to the user. Proposed prototypes and features prioritized transparency, user-controlled safety, data ownership, accessibility by default, restorative justice, and the welfare of content moderators.

The overarching vision is for a social media ecosystem that is less commercialized, more decentralized, and built on principles of care, consent, and community accountability.

## SECTION 02

# WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND DEMOGRAPHICS



The workshops followed a standardized format to ground discussions in **personal experience** before moving to ideation.

## Goa

September 29, 2025

(18 participants)

## Delhi

October 3, 2025

(20 participants)



## Mumbai

September 30, 2025

(21 participants)

## Bangalore

September 25, 2025

(33 participants)

### Common Activities:

**Icebreaker (My Social Media Story in One Word):**

Participants described their relationship with social media in a single word or phrase.

**Story Circles ("Tale of Two Timelines"):**

Participants shared one positive and one negative personal story related to social media.

**Ideation & Prototyping ("Building Our Mohalla"):**

Participants broke into groups focused on specific themes (e.g., Safety, Transparency, Data) to brainstorm and create low-fidelity prototypes of new features or platforms.

### Code of Conduct:

All workshops operated under a safe space policy, ensuring participant contributions would not be directly attributed in reports.

## SECTION 03

# THEMATIC ANALYSIS: KEY PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA



The icebreaker and story circle sessions revealed a deeply conflicted relationship with social media.

While positive aspects were acknowledged, the weight of negative experiences dominated the discussions.

PEACOCKING  
CHAOS  
REPOSITORY  
TRENDS  
PERFORMANCE  
SUBSTANCE  
ADDICTIVE  
CONSUMPTION  
RABBIT HOLE  
LEDGER  
BUSINESS  
CREATIVE  
DOOMSCROLLING  
SCAMS  
SCROLLING  
FREEDOM  
AURA FARMING  
IDENTITY  
LIMITLESS  
BRAINROT  
CURATED  
REGULATING  
HARM  
INVASIVE  
RAGEBAIT  
FOMO  
CONNECTION  
INCONSISTENCIES  
RESTRICTIONS  
HEADRUSH  
WORRYING  
PANOPTICON  
BOTTOMLESS WELL  
BUBBLE

DETACHED  
EXHAUSTION  
SPLIT PERSONALITY  
OVERSTIMULATION  
DECEPTIVE  
MIRROR  
POLARISING  
DILEMMA  
CLUTTER  
PERSPECTIVE  
WAVES  
NEEDLESS  
INTEGRAL  
AGENDA  
EVOLUTION  
CONVOLUTED  
ANXIETY  
CONNECT  
VICARIOUS  
ADVERTISING  
TIRING  
ARCHIVE  
TIMEPASS  
STRESSFUL  
SHOCK  
BOTTOMLESS PIT  
DIABOLICAL  
SELF-CENTERED  
LIFELINE  
INFORMATION  
DOUBLE-EDGED  
SWORD  
UNAVOIDABLE  
MEANS

PERTINENT  
EXPRESSION  
STRUGGLE  
CONFLICTUAL  
DISTRACTION  
CONVENIENT  
GRATIFICATION  
STORIES  
SPACE  
START  
WORLD  
VOICE  
FIRE  
LOVE  
HATE  
RELATIONSHIPS  
SERENDIPITY  
ECHO-CHAMBERS  
DIZZY  
TUG OF WAR  
SELF-EXPRESSION  
FICKLE  
ENTERTAINMENT  
CONDITION  
ALGORITHMIC  
AMPLIFIER  
LOUDSPEAKER  
NETWORK  
CLUSTER  
VALIDATION  
ADDICTION  
STRESS  
SELF-CENTRIC

## A. Overwhelming Negative Sentiment

The one-word descriptions set a predominantly negative tone in every workshop.

### Mental Health Impact:

Common words included anxiety, stressful, exhausting, tiring, doomscrolling, and brain rot.

### Conflict and Division:

People called it a double-edged sword, describing love-hate relationships, tug of war, and polarised spaces.

### Inauthenticity and Pressure:

Platforms were seen as performative and curated, built around peacocking and performance without substance.





## **B. Safety, Harassment, and Real-World Consequences**

Personal stories vividly illustrated how online toxicity translates into real-world harm.

### **Trolling and Hate Speech:**

Participants described being targeted for their work or opinions, facing hateful comments, and experiencing confidence-shattering trolling. One participant's first big show was derailed by a single cruel remark.

### **Doxxing and Threats:**

Several stories involved serious escalation—doxxing during the farmers' protest, rape and death threats for political views, and harassment reaching workplaces. In one case, a YouTuber filed a defamation case against a participant, making them the public face of the dispute.

### **Stalking and Privacy Invasion:**

Many recounted "creepy" episodes of being located online after brief encounters. One person was physically followed across multiple locations after being tracked online, eventually leaving WhatsApp entirely.

### **State and Police Involvement:**

In one Mumbai incident, a simple post about a peace walk triggered police calls urging the organiser to cancel, citing the 'country's atmosphere.'



### **C. Trapped by the Feed and Echo Chambers**

A significant source of frustration was the lack of control over feeds and the feeling of being trapped by algorithms.

#### **Stagnant and Manipulated Feeds:**

Participants complained about seeing the same feed that “never seems to change” and the existence of “echo chambers just being boxed into those opinions”. One person cited an article about Facebook manipulating feeds to show distressing content.

#### **Repetitive Content Traps:**

Participants noted that even after blocking certain accounts, their feed kept resurfacing the same voices and opinions. Others described how feeds slide from light or harmless content into darker or more disturbing spaces without warning. A Delhi participant shared how YouTube’s autoplay jumped from children’s songs to violent clips, while another from Goa said their feed “never seems to change,” no matter what they follow or hide.



#### **D. Positive Experiences and Empowerment**

Despite the negatives, participants valued social media for several key reasons.

##### **Finding Community and Safe Spaces:**

Social media was a lifeline for finding community, especially for queer and neurodivergent individuals who found niche, affirming spaces on platforms like Reddit and Tumblr. For one trans person, voice apps like Clubhouse provided an experimental space to “test” their desired name and come out gradually.

##### **Professional Utility and Visibility:**

Artists and creators rely on platforms to showcase their work for free, sell art directly without middlemen, and gain validation. One participant’s career path was changed after seeing a single Instagram reel.

##### **Civic Engagement and Amplifying Voices:**

Social media was cited as a powerful tool for activism and political action. Examples include mobilizing blood donors, organizing “digital riots”, and enabling marginalized groups like Dalit voices to tell their own stories without relying on legacy media. One participant noted that a single tweet was more effective in fighting a bill than a month of phone calls.

## SECTION 04

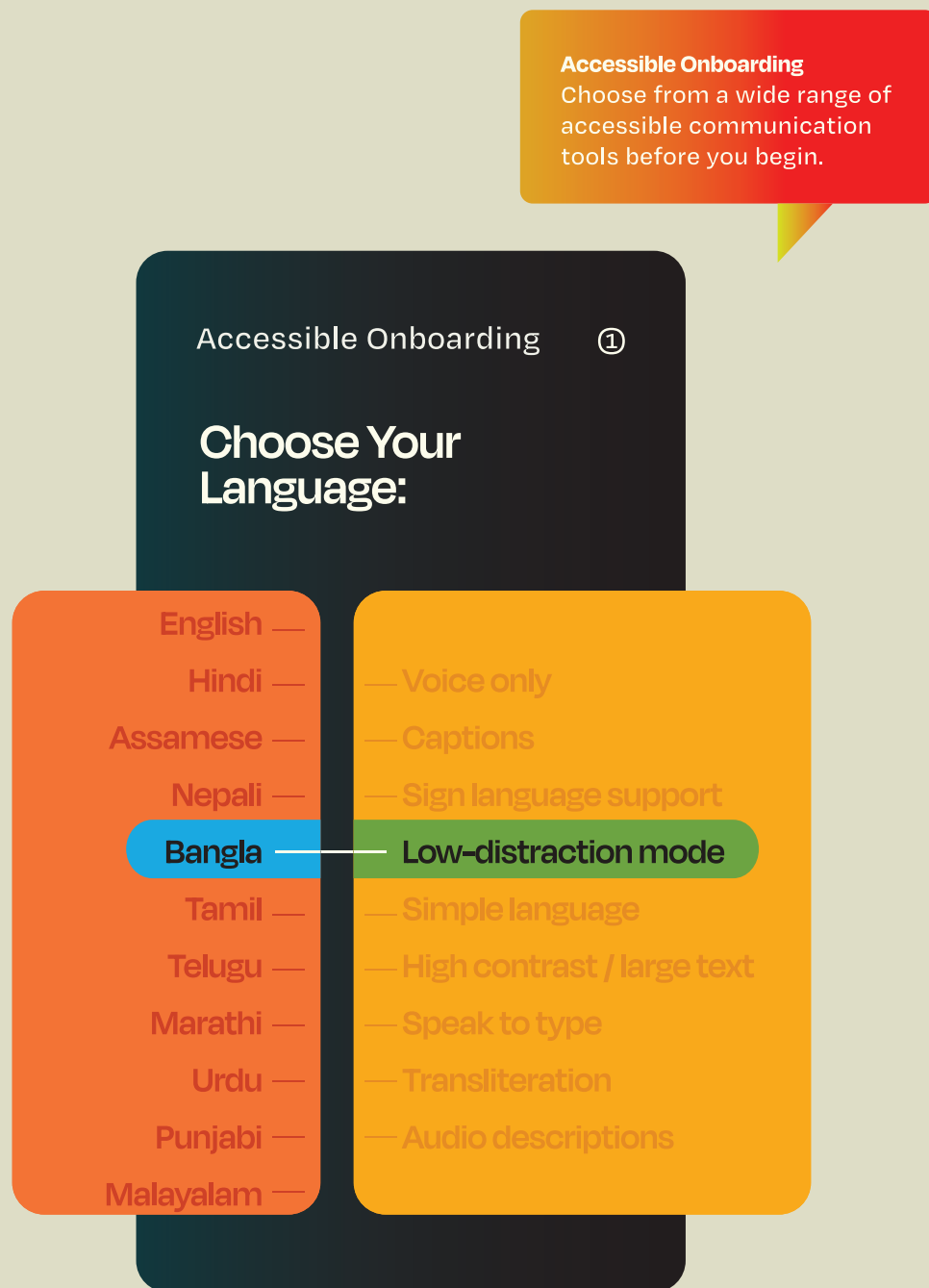
# KEY IDEAS & PROTOTYPES

- A. Accessible Onboarding
- B. Your Data, Your Terms
- C. The Safety Tour
- D. The Transparency Dashboard



These prototypes imagine a social media experience built around clarity, consent, and user agency.

Each section explores a different part of the journey. Across these flows, a consistent principle emerges: users should know what is happening, why it is happening, and how to change it.



## A. Accessible Onboarding

From the moment a user signs up, accessibility is treated as a starting condition rather than an optional setting buried deep inside menus. The process centers choice: users select their preferred language, communication mode, and interface adjustments before they see a single post or suggestion.

By offering tools such as voice-only navigation, sign language support, low-distraction modes, high-contrast text, captions, transliteration, and audio descriptions, the platform establishes clarity and autonomy from the first screen. This approach ensures that people who are often excluded—because of language, disability, bandwidth, or device constraints—can participate fully.

The onboarding design also reframes accessibility as something everyone benefits from, not a special pathway for a few. Instead of forcing adaptation, it adapts to the user's needs. In doing so, it establishes a baseline expectation: digital experiences should be customisable, comprehensible, and respectful of diverse ways of communicating.

### Your Data, Your Terms

Customisable policies and value-based data practices you can actually understand.

① Share a few basic details so the platform can tailor explanations to your age and context.

Terms & Conditions ① ② ③

Before we begin:

How old are you?

Age

What is your cultural context?

Country

Language

Ethnicity

Gender



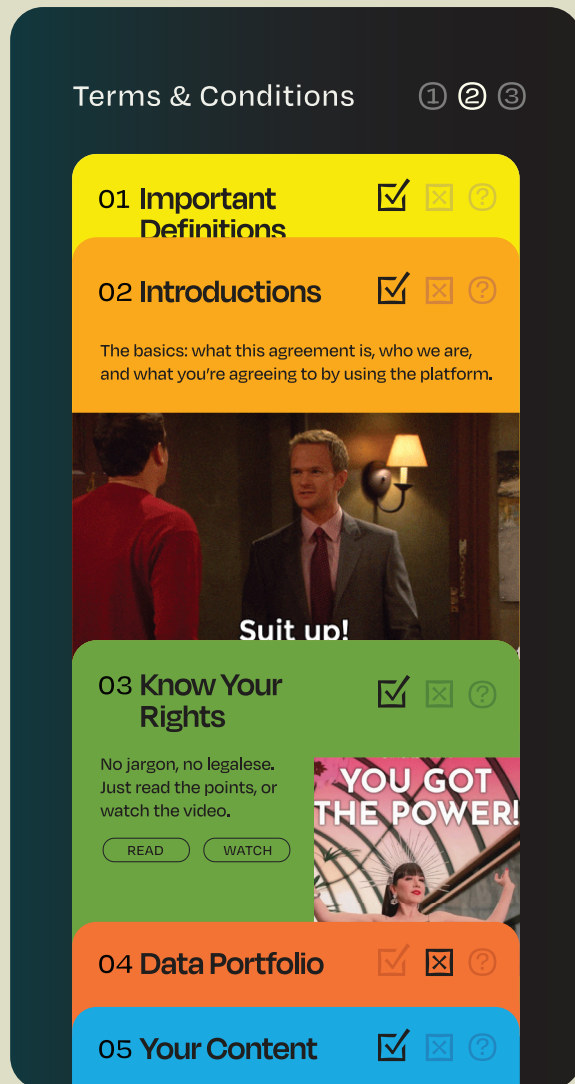
## B. Terms and Conditions

This section reframes the most avoided part of any platform—Terms & Conditions—into an experience that is actually meant to be understood. Instead of pages of dense legal text, users encounter contextual explanations tailored to age, location, and linguistic background.

The flow begins with a few basic questions that help the system determine the right level of detail needed. Key concepts such as definitions, rights, data use, and content ownership are presented in simple formats—readable summaries, visual explanations, and optional videos. The aim is not to dilute legal accuracy but to make it accessible and transparent. Users can inspect each policy component, see how their information will be used, and make informed decisions through granular opt-ins rather than blanket consent.

This transforms the T&C from a performative formality into a tool for agency. By placing clarity over complexity and comprehension over compliance, the platform acknowledges that understanding one's rights is a fundamental part of digital safety.

② See the Terms & Conditions in a format made for your age, location, and level of understanding.



③ Inspect each data category and change, restrict, or revoke how it's being used.



### The Safety Tour

Offers a clear, visual way to understand, enable or disable key protection tools.

① Explore the broad safety categories and choose where you want to begin.



## C. The Safety Tour

The Safety Tour offers a visual walkthrough of the tools that help users navigate online spaces with confidence.

Instead of hiding safety settings behind layers of menus, this feature brings them forward through interactive explanations and clear pathways. Users can explore categories such as reporting, visibility, group controls, keyword filters, and chat pulse-checks—each presented with simple toggles, concise text, and optional short explainers.

The tour emphasizes personalisation: users decide which protections to activate, how visible they want to be, and the boundaries they want to maintain across interactions. By showing why each feature exists and how it works, the platform shifts safety from a reactive act to a proactive choice. In parallel, the interface avoids moralising or policing, instead offering tools that respect autonomy while supporting comfort, consent, and control.

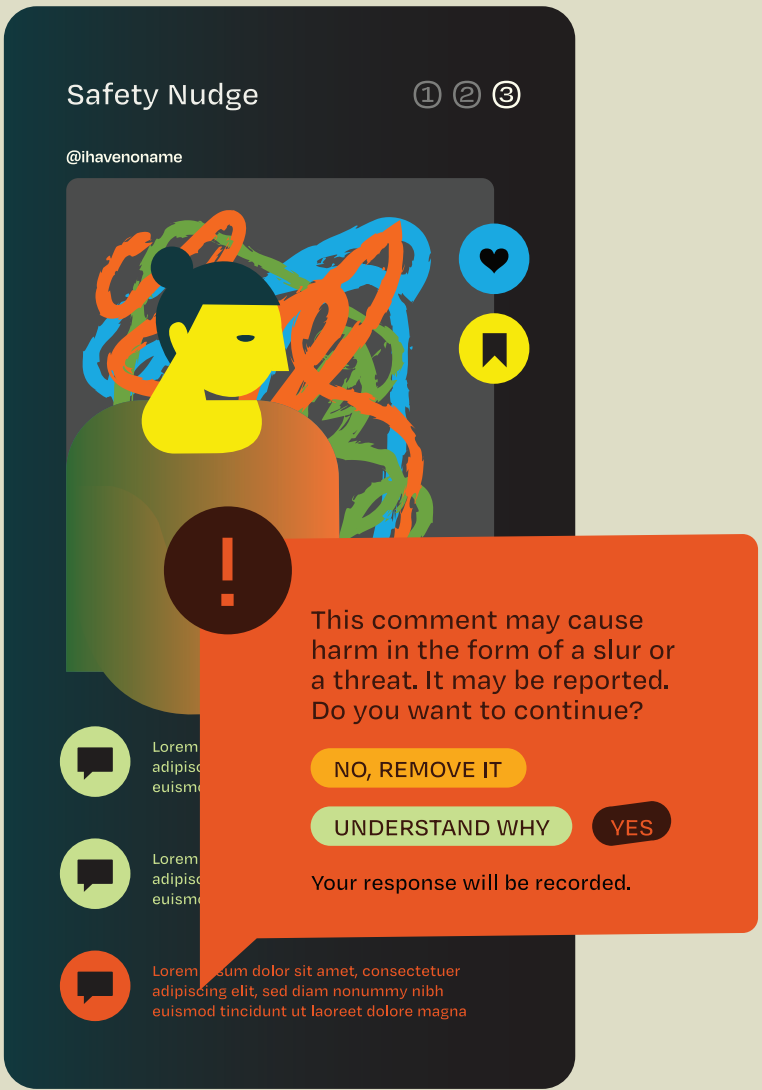
Ultimately, the Safety Tour positions safety not as a response to harm but as part of everyday navigation, giving people the clarity and confidence to shape their online environment.



② Turn individual safety features on or off, or watch short explainers to understand how they work.



③ Take a moment to rethink flagged words or threats, or continue if you choose. Your response will be recorded.



**The Transparency Dashboard**  
Makes the algorithm visible,  
understandable, and fully  
user-controlled.

① Choose which parts of  
your activity the algorithm  
can learn from.

Transparency  
Dashboard

① ② ③

## What Should Affect Your Algorithm?

Profile & Personal Details ☒

Pages Followed ☒

Browser Activity ☒

Saved Content ☒

Current Location ☒

Community Participation ☒

Active Likes ☒

### D. The Transparency Dashboard

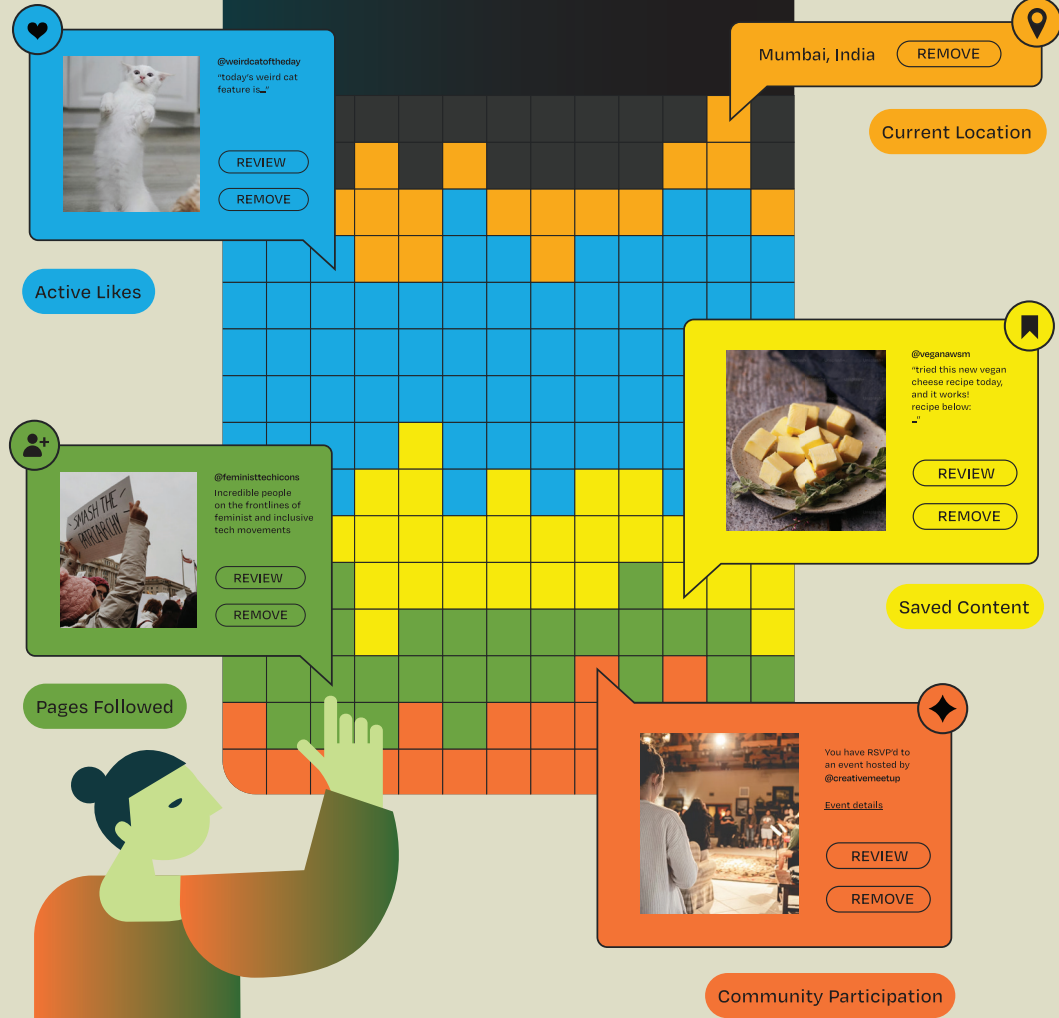
The Transparency Dashboard makes the algorithm visible, interpretable, and adjustable by the user.

Rather than leaving people to guess why certain posts appear or which behaviours influence their feed, the dashboard lays out the system's logic in real time. Users can choose which activities—likes, saved posts, pages followed, community participation, or location signals—should shape recommendations. Each data point is presented as something they can review, remove, or restrict, shifting control from platform-driven inference to user-defined preference.

This transparency is not decorative; it repositions the algorithm as a tool that belongs to the user, not a mechanism operating silently in the background. By inspecting, enabling, or turning off inputs, people can curate a healthier, more intentional digital environment. The dashboard also reinforces the idea that recommendation systems need not be opaque or manipulative—they can be accountable, explainable, and configurable. In doing so, it establishes a new norm: algorithms should serve users, not the other way around.

② See in real time, which data points are shaping the feed and why each post appears.

③ See how your data earns value each week (like an investment) and update your preferences anytime.





Beyond individual features, participants proposed **system-level shifts** that reshape how platforms operate.

These ideas push for community-led oversight, culturally grounded guidelines, non-profit models, fair labor protections, and local mechanisms for accountability—expanding what a healthier, more equitable digital ecosystem could look like.

**Independent Oversight:**

A non-governmental body could rate and certify apps based on their transparency, data policies, and grievance mechanisms.

**Non-Profit Models:**

Platforms that prioritize information over profit, like Wikipedia, Subreddits, and Discord, offer a better model for transparency and community self-regulation.

**Culturally Contextual Guidelines:**

Platform guidelines must be evolved beyond Western-centric views to address harm faced by marginalized identities in different cultural contexts, such as India.

**Local Action:**

Instead of relying solely on big tech platforms, local NGOs and communities could be empowered to act on reports of harm.

**Fair Labor Practices:**

Moderators need fair wages, the right to unionize, and robust mental health support as part of their contract.

**Abolish NDAs:**

Non-Disclosure Agreements should be fully abolished to allow moderators to speak about their work and its psychological impact.

SECTION 05

CONCLUSION

Names of Participants

XYZ

XYZ

ABC

ABC

XYZ

ABC



Reimagining social media is not only a technical challenge but a cultural one.

The transition will demand cross-sector collaboration between technologists, designers, policymakers, and users themselves—but the vision is clear: digital ecosystems designed for accountability, safety, and genuine community.

## Workshop Venue Partners



### POV MUMBAI

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