



Democracy in India – Social Media Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is a system of government in which the citizens exercise power directly or elect representatives from among themselves to form a governing body, such as a parliament. It is also referred as "rule of the majority". Here the power can't be inherited. People elect their leaders. Representatives stand in an election and the citizens vote for their representative. The representative with the most number of votes gets the power.

In the new media world, the algorithm-driven Internet has become the mother lode for all media platforms. The new media consumers' media preferences are driven by three main considerations: mobility, portability and personalization of news to suit their tastes. So the basic challenge to free media, as Tim Lee foresaw, arises out of the dark depths of the Internet itself. A speedy consumption of sensationalized fake news masquerading as real news by unsuspecting millions proves the old adage correct about bad money ultimately driving out the good one. It is even more sinister that political parties, with deep pockets all over the world, are beginning to employ and fund faceless sites for fake news to dupe and divide the voters, tarnish their rivals and the professional players in the mainstream media. Such fake sites now have technically savvy handlers who can block certain users or certain types of vital public information and even replace them with doctored videos and audios.

1. Introduction

Media is the communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data. It is associated with the mass media communication businesses such as print media, the press, photography, advertising, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), and publishing. The phrase "mass media" was, according to H.L. Mencken, used as early as 1923 in the United States.

The term media in its modern application relating to communication channels was first used by Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan, who stated in *Counterblast* (1954): "The media are not toys; they should not be in the hands of Mother Goose and Peter Pan executives. They can be entrusted only to new artists, because they are art forms." By the mid-1960s, the term had spread to general use in North America and the United Kingdom. Media technology has made viewing increasingly easier as time has passed throughout history. Children today are encouraged to use media tools in school and are expected to have a general understanding of the various technologies available. The internet is arguably one of the most effective tools in media for communication tools such as e-mail, Skype, and Facebook have brought people closer together and created new online communities. However, some may argue that certain types of media can hinder face-to-face. Therefore, it is an important source of communication. The role of regulatory authorities (license broadcaster institutions, content providers, platforms) and the resistance to political and commercial interference in the autonomy of the media sector are both considered as significant components of media independence.

In order to ensure media independence, regulatory authorities should be placed outside of governments' directives. This can be measured through legislation, agency statutes and rules. Governments worldwide have sought to extend regulation to internet companies, whether connectivity providers or application service

providers, and whether domestically or foreign-based. The impact on journalistic content can be severe, as internet companies can err too much on the side of caution and take down news reports, including algorithmically, while offering inadequate opportunities for redress to the affected news producers. Modern communication media now allow for intense long-distance exchanges between larger numbers of people (many-to-many communication via e-mail, Internet forums, and teleportation). On the other hand, many traditional broadcast media and mass media favor one-to-many communication (television, cinema, radio, newspaper, magazines, and also social media).

The politics of India takes place within the framework of the country's constitution. India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic in which the President of India is the head of state and the Prime Minister of India is the head of government. India follows the dual polity system, i.e. a double government that consists of the central authority at the centre and states at the periphery. The constitution defines the organisational powers and limitations of both central and state governments, and it is well-recognised, rigid and considered supreme; i.e. the laws of the nation must conform to it.

There is a provision for a bicameral legislature consisting of an upper house, the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), which represents the states of the Indian federation, and a lower house, the Lok Sabha (House of the People), which represents the people of India as a whole. The Indian constitution provides for an independent judiciary, which is headed by the Supreme Court. The court's mandate is to protect the constitution, to settle disputes between the central government and the states, to settle inter-state disputes, to nullify any central or state laws that go against the constitution and to protect the fundamental rights of citizens, issuing writs for their enforcement in cases of violation.

Governments are formed through elections held every five years (unless otherwise specified), by parties that secure a majority of members in their respective lower houses (Lok Sabha in the central government and Vidhan Sabha in states). India had its first general election in 1951, which was won by the Indian National Congress, a political party that went on to dominate subsequent elections until 1977, when a non-Congress government was formed for the first time in independent India. The 1990s saw the end of single-party domination and the rise of coalition governments. The elections for the 16th Lok Sabha, held from April 2014 to May 2014, once again brought back single-party rule in the country, with the Bharatiya Janata Party being able to claim a majority in the Lok Sabha.

In recent decades, Indian politics has become a dynastic affair. Possible reasons for this could be the absence of party organisations, independent civil society associations that mobilise support for the parties and centralised financing of elections. The Economist Intelligence Unit rated India as a "flawed democracy" in 2016.

2. Indian Political Review – Democracy

Compared with other democratic countries, India has a large number of political parties. It has been estimated that over 200 parties were formed after India became independent in 1947.

Some features of the political parties in India are that the parties are generally woven around their leaders, the leaders are actively playing a dominant role, and that the role of leadership can be transferred, thus tending to take a dynastic route. The two main parties in India are the Bharatiya Janata Party, also known as the BJP and the Indian National Congress, commonly called the INC or simply Congress. These two parties dominate national politics. On the left-right political spectrum, the Indian National Congress is a welfare-heavy, centre party, whereas the BJP is a fiscally conservative, Right-wing party.

There are two types of political parties in India - National Party and Regional/State party. Every political party must bear a symbol and must be registered with the Election Commission of India. Symbols are used in Indian political system as an identity of political parties and so that illiterate people can also vote by recognizing symbols of party.

In the current amendment to the Symbols Order, the Commission has infused the following five principles, which, in its view, should govern the polity in the country, situate as it is in its present state:

1. Legislative presence is a must for recognition as a National or State party.
2. For a National party, it must be the legislative presence in the Lok Sabha and for a State party, the legislative presence must be reflected in the State Assembly.
3. In any election, a party can set up a candidate only from amongst its own members.
4. A party, that loses its recognition, shall not lose its symbol immediately, but shall be given the facility to use that symbol for some time to try and retrieve its status. (However, the grant of such facility to the party to use its symbol will not mean the extension of other facilities to it, as are available to recognized parties, like, free time on Doordarshan/AIR, free supply of copies of electoral rolls, etc.)
5. Recognition should be given to a party only on the basis of its own performance in elections and not because it is a splinter group of some other recognized party.

The lack of homogeneity in the Indian population causes division between different sections of the people based on religion, region, language, caste and race. This has led to the rise of political parties with agendas catering to one or a mix of these groups. Parties in India also target people who are not in favour of other parties and use them as an asset.

Some parties openly profess their focus on a particular group; for example, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's focus on the Dravidian population and Tamil identity; Biju Janata Dal's championing of Odia culture; the Shiv Sena's pro-Marathi agenda; Naga People's Front's demand for protection of Naga tribal identity; People's Democratic Party and National Conference's calling for Kashmiri Muslim identity. Some other parties claim to be universal in nature, but tend to draw support from particular sections of the population. For example, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (translated as National People's Party) has a vote bank among the Yadav and Muslim population of Bihar and the All India Trinamool Congress does not have any significant support outside West Bengal.

The narrow focus and votebank politics of most parties, even in the central government and central legislature, sidelines national issues such as economic welfare and national security. Moreover, internal security is also threatened as incidences of political parties instigating and leading violence between two opposing groups of people is a frequent occurrence.

3. Social Media:

Information and communication technology has changed rapidly over the past 20 years with a key development being the emergence of social media. The pace of change is accelerating. For example, the development of mobile technology has played an important role in shaping the impact of social media. Across the globe, mobile devices dominate in terms of total minutes spent online. This puts the means to connect anywhere, at any time on any device in everyone's hands.

A new study from Pew Research claims that 62 percent of people get their news from social media, with 18 percent doing so very often. In comparison to other media, social media's influence in political campaigns has increased tremendously. Social networks play an increasingly important role in electoral politics — first in the ultimately unsuccessful candidacy of Howard Dean in 2003, and then in the election of the first African-American president in 2008.

The New York Times reports that “The election of Donald J. Trump is perhaps the starkest illustration yet that across the planet, social networks are helping to fundamentally rewire human society.” Because social media allows people to communicate with one another more freely, they are helping to create surprisingly influential social organizations among once-marginalized groups.

Social media plays huge rolls in modern day politics and is one of (if not) the most valuable assets that parties use to gain votes. This is down to the pure reach of social media and its capabilities to be seen by millions of people in a matter of minutes. Take a look back at the last election campaigns in the UK and see how both parties spent millions on social media to help tarnish each other's names and policies. A positive development of social

media emergence has been that the youth is talking about the political issues. Earlier the political discussions were restricted only to those who read newspapers, watched news channels or participated in discussions in nakkad of a village or clubs. But now, social networking has made the youth of India to sit up and discuss political issues. They spend time to analyze and discuss politics.

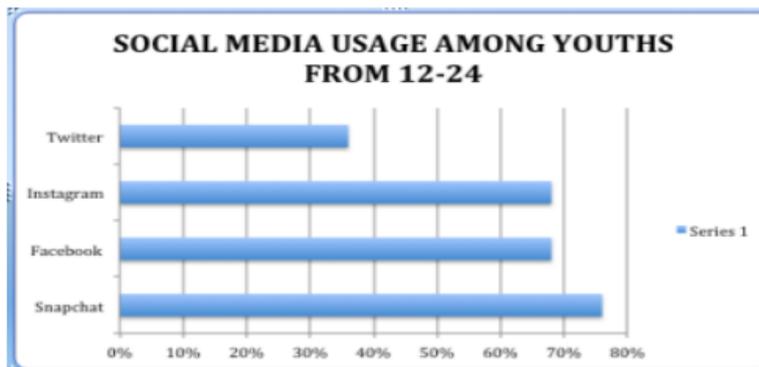


Figure 1: Social Media Usage Among Youths from 12-24

Every morning, almost every individual's first instinct is to reach for their phone and check through their notifications and social media accounts. They wake up scrolling through them, liking pictures, commenting, sharing, tweeting, etcetera. There is never a moment where an individual is not connected through a social media platform somehow. Social media has become big part of our lives, and most of us cannot live without it. We spend every waking second engaging with it, learning and receiving new information, ideas, and concepts through it. This has shaped our culture, our society, and, perhaps, even our general view of life. And in the moments where we are not attached to it, we react in ways that are similar to the symptoms of withdrawal. People hardly consider or ponder about why we feel that way, and how heavily social media impacts us as a society.

As the technology is growing the social media has become the routine for each and every person, peoples are seen addicted with these technology every day. With different fields its impact is different on people. Social media has increased the quality and rate of collaboration for students. Business uses social media to enhance an organization's performance in various ways such as to accomplish business objectives, increasing annual sales of the organization. Youngsters are seen in contact with these media daily .Social media has various merits but it also has some demerits which affect people negatively. False information can lead the education system to failure, in an organization wrong advertisement will affect the productivity, social media can abuse the society by invading on people's privacy, some useless blogs can influence youth that can become violent and can take some inappropriate actions.

4. Conclusions

Once people have a better understanding and grasp on the pros and cons of social media, and how to utilize it to their advantage, I'm certain that people will be able to be a little less addicted to it. However, that may not always be the case, but I certainly hope that as a society, we will control social media, rather than let it control us. We are in charge of the narrative, not the other way around. Use of social media is beneficial but should be used in a limited way without getting addicted. The advent of social media has enabled an unprecedented empowerment and engagement of the 'aam aadmi' for expressing political opinions. They now have views on the happenings of political events and they also influence the administrative decision making. But getting the youngsters together to vote in elections and using social media as a platform to help political parties is still a pipeline dream. It may take decades in India to replicate USA in the use of social media campaigning and to influence the voters. Social media revolution in the Indian political space is real, tangible and accelerating. Though it may not bring in huge changes immediately, but still it will play an important role in creating political awareness, which in itself is a huge step forward for a developing country like India.

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