Role of Social Media in the Indian democracy: Opportunity and Challenges

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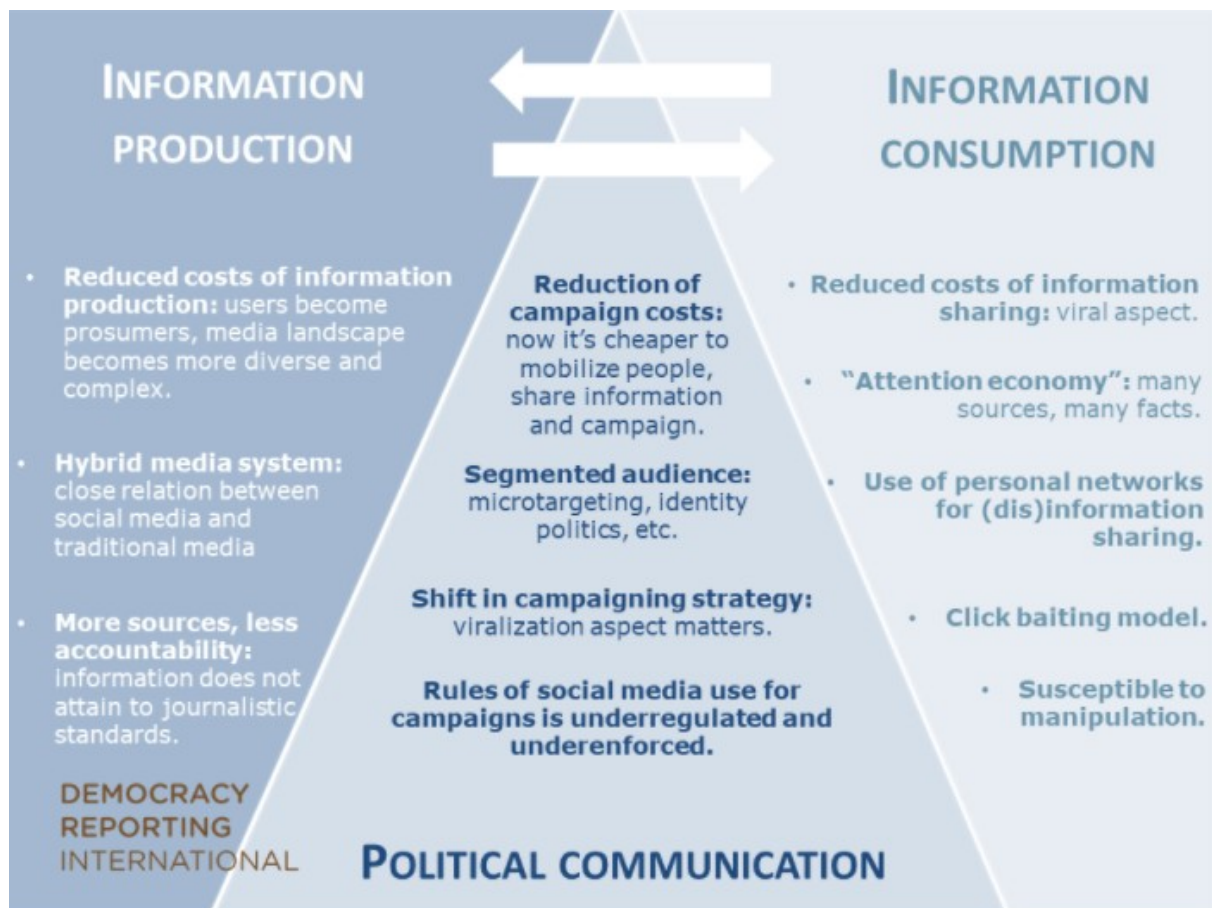**Application no. 200810147441**

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Introduction

Public participation is the bedrock of a successful and vibrant democracy. Countries across the globe including India took to newer modes of public communication even as their democracies kept evolving. The digital mode of communication is now the most effective mode of communication. Tweets and Facebook posts, YouTube videos, WhatsApp messages are sources of information even for the so-called mainstream communication channels.

Anuradha Rao in her article "How did Social Media Impact India's 2019 General Election?", in Economic and Political Weekly analysed the recently conducted 2019 General elections in India and the role of social media. She argues in line with the global trend, social media has been increasingly used by Indian politicians for routine political communication to directly connect with their supporters. However, unethical practices online by political actors have led to a spike in violence and affected decision making on the national security front. The advent of social media has changed how politics is being organised and conducted, as well as the nature of political communication in India.

On the one hand, social media has allowed for the democratisation of politics and reenergised the political landscape. On the other, several ethical dilemmas arise with the involvement of political actors in the non-ethical uses of social media as well as increased phenomenon of fake news and ultra-nationalism. Brian and Dan in their book critically investigate the complex interaction between social media and contemporary democratic politics, and provide a grounded analysis of the emerging importance of Social media in civic engagement. Social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have increasingly been adopted by politicians, political activists and social movements as a means to engage, organize and communicate with citizens worldwide.

INFORMATION PRODUCTION

INFORMATION CONSUMPTION

- **Reduced costs of information production:** users become prosumers, media landscape becomes more diverse and complex.

- **Hybrid media system:** close relation between social media and traditional media

- **More sources, less accountability:** information does not attain to journalistic standards.

DEMOCRACY REPORTING INTERNATIONAL

Reduction of campaign costs: now it's cheaper to mobilize people, share information and campaign.

Segmented audience: microtargeting, identity politics, etc.

Shift in campaigning strategy: viralization aspect matters.

Rules of social media use for campaigns is underregulated and underenforced.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

- **Reduced costs of information sharing:** viral aspect.

- **"Attention economy":** many sources, many facts.

- **Use of personal networks for (dis)information sharing.**

- **Click baiting model.**

- **Susceptible to manipulation.**

Drawing on Obama's Presidential campaign, opposition and protests in the Arab states, and the mobilization of support for campaigns against tuition fee increases and the UK Uncut demonstrations, this book presents evidence-based research and analysis. Renowned international scholars examine the salience of the network as a metaphor for understanding our social world, but also the centrality of the Internet in civic and political networks. Whilst acknowledging the power of social media, the contributors question the claim it is a utopian tool of democracy, and suggests a cautious approach to facilitate more participative democracy is necessary. In another well researched article, the author Amba argues that how information of people on social media platforms was used as fodder for a political campaign, without their knowledge or consent.

Cambridge Analytica used deceptive means (illegal in several countries) to gain access from Facebook to "granular" information about more than 50 million Americans and deployed it to tailor political messaging for Donald Trump's (eventually successful) presidential campaign. Even reports in media also alleged role of Cambridge Analytica's role in Indian elections. She touches on several important points like propaganda over social media and how it distorts the democracy. This distortion, too, is an "invasion of autonomy." India's constitutional jurisprudence affirms that a range of informational choices is intrinsically important for both individual freedom and democracy. She gives some solution especially for the 17th Lok Sabha elections. Implementing transparency in political advertising and data-protection norms is

urgent, particularly as India approaches its 2019 elections. On-the-ground research from India will illuminate and contextualise solutions being deployed elsewhere in the world.

Rationale of the Study

As news consumption moves away from traditional media to social media channels, political campaigning and political communication is also getting change in a big way. While the birth of social media is based on the democratic principles of the Internet and its technological ability to be open and accessible to all, it has evolved to not only be inclusive and participative but also disruptive. The objective of this study is to find out how the social media is influencing the voting behaviour of Indian voters as they are getting exposed more and more of political advertisement and political communication on social media. And ultimately how this is bringing change in the Indian democracy. What are the challenges in this ongoing process and how we can overcome these challenges?

Brief review of related literature

Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler in their book brings to the table the other dimension of internet. They tried to show that internet has the potential to improve public communications and enrich democracy, a project that requires imaginative policy-making. This argument is developed through three stages: first exploring the theoretical foundations for renewing democratic citizenship, then examining practical case studies of e-democracy, and finally, reviewing the limitations of recent policies designed to promote e-democracy and setting out a radical, but practical proposal for an online civic commons: a trusted public space where the dispersed energies, self-articulations and aspirations of citizens can be rehearsed, in public, within a process of ongoing feedback to the various levels and centre of governance: local, national and transnational. Another book to show the use and misuse of media especially western media is nu Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman. Though this book is written three decades back and in the context of western world but it is quite relevant in the today's politically charged media houses and propaganda done through social media in India. In this book the authors propose that the mass communication media of the U.S./West "are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and selfcensorship, and without overt coercion", by means of the propaganda model of communication. Similarly George Orwell's book Nineteen EightyFour is more than seven decade old yet relevant in the present context of rising fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, etc seen in the various elections around the world including India. The book centres on the consequences of government over-reach, totalitarianism, mass surveillance, and repressive regimentation of all persons and behaviours within society. More broadly, it examines the role of truth and facts within politics and their manipulation. A literature survey of Role of Social Media in the Indian democracy reveals

that research on this subject is very limited and fragmented especially in the Indian context. Our knowledge of social media's influence on political participation and political outcomes is still imprecise and incomplete, this is due to the fact that role is social media is in politics is a very new phenomenon which has not been researched deeply and properly. Very few books or text has been written on this subject by Indian scholars.

Research Questions

1. Evolution of role of social media & how it moulded the political discourse of Indian society?

2. How political parties are using different social media platforms for political campaigning & political communication?

3. What is the reach of social media in different sections of Indian society & up to what extent it has impacted the decision making of Indian voters? Does it result in an informed society or manufacturing consent?

4. Has social media made the Indian democracy more participative, inclusive & diverse or has it led to fake news, polarized society, flouting ethical norms, majoritarianism, jingoistic nationalism, mudslinging, data breach & privacy issue, politicising national security, etc?

5. What can be done to regulate the unregulated field of social media & to remove the fake news & communal propaganda without suppressing the free speech & expression?

6. How to make political actors accountable for their political campaigning on social media & making voters more vigilant through digital literacy?

7. What is the future of social media and how it can be positively used to bring governance reforms?

Proposed Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methods of research will be used to collect information and data to draw inferences. Keeping in view the research problem and its objectives various techniques of Descriptive method of research is used to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the existing status of role of social media in Indian democracy. Case study method is used to collect information about particular incidents of role of social media in political campaigning and political communication during elections. Various techniques of survey method like evaluative survey, documentary survey, cross sectional survey and sample survey will be used. Documentary survey method is used to find out facts in the context of rising misinformation, disinformation, fake news, data breach etc on social media through analysis of data already available in the form of printed text viz., books, official records, research reports, review articles, research papers, information bulletins, handouts, prospectus, annual reports, periodicals, progress reports, experience of individuals, news items etc. Data collection techniques involves observation records, administration of questionnaires in face to face situations or postal communication, face to face interviews or

telephonic interviews etc. to discover how social media has made the Indian democracy more participative, inclusive & diverse and how it has impacted the decision making of Indian voters.

Procedure of Data Collection & Analysis

In this research work both primary and secondary sources will be used for collection of facts and data. Primary Sources – Primary sources for the research includes interview conducted to study influence of social media on the voting behaviour and decision making of Indian voters, political literacy, political campaigning, political communication etc. Indices released by various institutions related to health of democracy like Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Democracy Ranking compiled by the Association for Development and Advancement of the Democracy Award, Global Web Index's Social Media Trends, All India Survey On Governance Issues And Voting Behaviour by Association for Democratic Reforms and official data released by government institutions like Election Commission of India, data by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation and data released by various news agencies like India Today, Times Group, The Indian Express, The Hindu, etc. Secondary sources – Books by various scholars like Brian Loader and Dan Mercea's "Social Media and Democracy: Innovations in Participatory Politics", Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler's "The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy" articles written by experts like "How did Social Media Impact India's 2019 General Election?" by Anuradha Rao in Economic and Political Weekly, seminars conducted by institutions like Election Commission of India , Association for Democratic Reforms, newspaper editorials like " Digital media is redefining modes of political communication and mass contact" in The Indian Express, "Is social media polarizing society?" in The Hindu, etc.

The **data collected will be analysed** with the help of <u>both quantitative and qualitative</u> techniques. Further data obtained from the reports/articles/papers will be analysed <u>using content analysis & percentage analysis method.</u>

References

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