Research paper draft

In the 21st century, social media has become an integral component in the lives of many. Social media has benefitted humanity tremendously by connecting people worldwide, strengthening interpersonal relationships, enabling the unrestricted flow of information, and providing oppressed communities with a voice. While there are numerous benefits of social media, there are also severe drawbacks. Social media's acute adverse effects on democracy are matters of grave concern. From enabling oppressive governments to "target politically active citizens" to "silencing dissents" (Dumbrava 1) that may arise among the voters, social media facilitates plenty of anti-democratic abilities for oppressive governments. The General Election of 2019 in India is an excellent instance of this. The utilization of social media by the ruling party in the Indian Election was strategic and extensive. Exploiting the deficiencies of social media enabled the ruling party to "secure a significant advantage" (Sen 3) over other political parties. This research paper will argue how, rather than bridging gaps between communities, bringing people together, promoting social harmony, and aiding democracy in India, political parties are now using social media to win votes unethically and gain substantial leverage by spreading hate, misinformation, violence, and distrust among the general population. This paper will first give background and significance of the BJP's win, then the numerous reasons and strategies behind BJP's win, and examine the polarizing nature of social media and the religious and societal divide it might create within India.

The date was the 23rd of May 2019. The entirety of India's population was eagerly waiting for only one thing: The 2019 general election results. 2019 elections were incredibly unique because "For the first time in the history of India's political platform, the national elections were fought both on the streets and by using smartphones and social media platforms using digital technology" (Sawshilya 3) and also for the first time in Indian history, there was the "highest ever national average voter turnout of 69.43 percent." (Election Commission of India 32) and also a "sharp increase in female electors by 5.1 percent." (Election Commission of India 33) The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) repeated its "improbable feat" (The Economic Times 3) of victory in North, East, and West India with a vote share of nearly 50 percent. (Statista 1). The scale of the BJP's "landslide victory in the 2019 Indian general election – where the party won 303 out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) – took most analysts by surprise." (Sen 2) For the first time in India's democratic history, a political party won the second term with such a massive majority. According to (Rodrigues 4), "it was the use of social media platforms as a communication tool for political campaigning that gained further ground for parties in India." Analysis of this impressive victory is crucial in understanding the pivotal role of social media in shaping Indian democracy. BJP spent "₹25.3 crores (3.06 million dollars) in advertisements across Facebook, Instagram, Google, and YouTube." (Statista 1) during the 2019 elections. The enormous expenditure solely on social media advertising enables the BJP to propel its political agenda aggressively and employ many unethical election-winning tactics on the masses that might "jeopardize national peace and harmony" (Gandhi). Examples include the promotion of aggressive nationalism, religious intolerance, distrust among people, group polarization, and extremism through social media propaganda.

The Information and Technology(IT) cell is the primary method through which BJP propels its political narrative in social media. IT cell is a "group of thousands of individuals managing hundreds of thousands of fake accounts on social media to spam propaganda" (Mehta 3). According to (Sengupta 5), Most of the content they post contains political memes, jokes, achievements of the parent political party, criticism of the opposition, posts about Hindu culture and history, news about BJP, and threats from the neighboring countries: China and Pakistan. An in-depth analysis performed by (Economic Times 4) actively demonstrates that there is a particular post template to follow for these millions of accounts. Their tweets and comments are identical and follow a similar posting frequency pattern. IT cells sometimes instigate "severe communal outbreaks of violence" (HRW 2). The Delhi Riots of 2020 are a great example of violence initiated by the IT cells. -TO BE CONTINUED

Another way the BJP gains votes is by using social media to induce a fear of national security into people's hearts. India has been in four wars since its Independence in 1947: The first Kashmir war of 1947, The Sino-Indian war of 1962, the Indo-Pak war of 1971, and the Kargil war of 1999. Also, since India's neighbors relatively China and Pakistan, there is already a deep fear among the general public of a two-front war in the east and the west. The BJP tries to capitalize on this element of fear and convert it into votes. Also, During the elections, people generally desire a prime minister who is very serious about the country's national security, has a robust foreign policy, and wants to make advancements in the defense sector and strengthen the army. - support-. BJP uses social media and the IT cells to constantly post about the wars - stats -, the advancements made in India's military during the reign of BJP, and exaggerated threats from China, Pakistan, and Turkey. This, as a result, gives rise to extremism within the country, and also it promotes aggressive nationalism. - stats-. This aggressive nationalism helps BJP stand out from other parties, and it helps them get many votes. This also causes a rise in hatred against northeastern Indians and the Muslim population of India because of their similarities to Chinese and Pakistani cultures. This causes discrimination and the othering of those communities in India. The Muslim population in Kashmir is so discriminated against by social media that they are sometimes forced to go down the path of radicalization.