Impact of social media on Indian Politics in Present Scenario

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Abstract

The relationship between media and politics in India is strong and deep, characterized by a dynamic interplay of influence, power and accountability. This summary describes the multifaceted impact of media on Indian politics, examining its role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy decisions and shaping the democratic landscape. The media, encompassing traditional forms such as print, broadcasting, and the ever-expanding digital sphere, serves as a primary medium by which political information is disseminated to the public. In this capacity, it plays an important role in agenda-setting, framing political discourse and shaping public perceptions about key issues and personalities. Political actors recognize the importance of media to reach voters, conveying their messages effectively across different platforms. From election campaigns to policy debates, media coverage influences voter behavior and shapes electoral outcomes, making it an important component of the political process. Furthermore, the media acts as a watchdog, holding political leaders accountable for their actions and decisions. The media exposes corruption, inefficiency and wrongdoing within the government to the public, promoting transparency and accountability in media governance. The fourth pillar plays an important role in ensuring that the voices of marginalized communities are raised and their problems are solved. Social justice and equality should be advocated through media. However, along with its constructive contributions, the media in India continues to grapple with challenges such as sensationalism, bias and misinformation The spread of fake news and biased reporting has fueled polarization and diminished public trust in the media. In the age of social media, where information spreads rapidly and uncontrolled, the challenge of distinguishing between fact and fiction has become increasingly difficult. The rise of media conglomerates with vested interests has further complicated the scenario, raising questions over media ownership, editorial independence and ethical journalism practices.

Keywords: Indian politics, influence, public opinion, democracy, accountability, journalism.

INTRODUCTION

The role of social media in Indian politics today has been nothing short of transformative. These platforms have fundamentally changed how political parties interact with voters, share messages, and influence public opinion. Over recent years, the political landscape in India has been dramatically reshaped, largely due to the rise and widespread use of social media. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have evolved into crucial spaces where political parties compete for attention, support, and, ultimately, power. Social media has brought about significant changes in political dynamics, communication strategies, and how citizens engage with politics. One of the most notable effects of social media on Indian politics is its ability to make the flow of information more democratic. In the past, political discourse was primarily controlled by mainstream media, with parties using rallies, speeches, and advertisements to present their messages. Now, social media allows politicians and the public to bypass traditional media, sharing their views, agendas, and critiques directly with a global audience with just a click. This shift has led to greater transparency and accountability, as politicians are now under constant scrutiny by an engaged and watchful online community.

Social media has become a powerful tool for political mobilization and organization, especially among the younger generation. Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have transformed into digital gathering spaces, enabling individuals to connect, discuss, and rally behind various political movements and causes. Whether it's organizing protests, promoting awareness of social issues, or supporting political candidates, social media has provided a stage for previously marginalized groups to raise their voices and bring about tangible change in the real world.

However, the impact of social media on Indian politics also comes with significant challenges and controversies. The rapid spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda has become a major concern, threatened the integrity of the democratic process and often led to division, confusion, and mistrust among voters. Additionally, the anonymity offered by these platforms has led to an increase in hate speech, online abuse, and targeted disinformation campaigns, deepening social rifts and undermining civil discourse.

Definition of new media

New media refers to the combination of two significant developments over the last few decades: the transformation of traditional media delivery methods and the rise of innovative digital communication technologies.

Two main processes have shaped what we now recognize as "new" media:

A. The transformation of traditional media delivery systems

Over the past few decades, there has been a significant shift in how media content is distributed. In the early 2000s, when traditional media dominated, most people accessed television through aerials, with only a handful of terrestrial channels available. Today, however, high-definition flat-screen TVs and access to hundreds of digital satellite and cable channels have become the standard.

B. The emergence of new communication technologies

Innovative technologies have introduced new ways of communication into everyday life. Personal computers and mobile phones, which have become widely accessible, are key examples of recent advancements. These technologies have particularly revolutionized communication through text messaging and other digital interactions.

Who Uses New Media

The rise of digital media has not been equally experienced by all groups. Some sociologists point to a "digital divide," highlighting unequal access to digital technology based on factors like age, class, and gender.

Age and the Digital Divide

Research suggests that individuals in the 16–24 age group engage with new media more than those aged 25 and older, with older adults using it the least. New media serves various purposes such as communication, work, gaming, and shopping, though the way it is used differs across age groups. Younger individuals predominantly use it for gaming, while young adults have more diverse social media habits and often maintain profiles on multiple platforms. In contrast, older social media users tend to prefer Face book

Features of new media:

- All electronic documents created through electronic channels are legally valid.

- Legal recognition is provided for all digital signatures.

- Specific measures are implemented to safeguard electronic records.

- The law also addresses offenses committed outside India.

- Appeals against decisions of the Cyber Tribunal can be made to the Supreme Court.

- Law enforcement officers have the authority to enter public places and arrest offenders without a warrant.

Additionally, the act includes several other provisions and features.

Types of new media in society

- Facebook – Facebook is the largest and most widely used social media platform. It played a key role in the rise of social media and now owns Instagram and WhatsApp. In India, there are approximately 280 million Facebook users, and it remains a hub of active participation for a vast audience.

- Twitter – Twitter is another highly popular platform, allowing citizens to express their views on various national issues. In India, there are around 14 million active users, making it a significant space for public discourse.

- WhatsApp – WhatsApp has a massive user base in India, making it the largest market for the platform. Virtually every active citizen is connected via WhatsApp, and its user count in India has reached 2 billion.

- Instagram – Instagram, also owned by Facebook, is particularly popular among the youth. The platform is used extensively for posting pictures, liking posts, and sharing content, often with creative filters. India has 88 million active users on Instagram, second only to the USA with 120 million.

- Additionally, other platforms like TikTok, LinkedIn, Hello App, and Snapchat contribute to the vast social media landscape in India, where people actively share thoughts and participate in daily conversations.

Constitutional Provisions on Social Media in India

India's Constitution contains various acts and laws that address the rights and responsibilities of citizens regarding social media. The most significant and protective right is the *Freedom of Speech and Expression.*

Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees that all citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression. This right is rooted in the Preamble of the Constitution, which aims

to secure liberty of thought and expression for all citizens. However, the exercise of this right is subject to reasonable restrictions, as specified in Article 19(2), which allows limitations in certain cases.

Freedom of speech is a nuanced right, as it is not absolute. It comes with special duties and responsibilities, meaning it can be subject to legal restrictions to maintain public order and safety. As outlined in Article 19(1)(a), this right allows citizens to express their views freely through various means, including speech, writing, print, pictures, or any other form of communication. It also includes the right to spread or publish individual opinions.

Punishments for Violations of Freedom of Speech and Expression

Violations of freedom of speech and expression are punishable under Section 295(A) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The punishment for this offense can include imprisonment for up to two years, a fine, or both.

The Information Technology Act of 2000 and 2008 outlines several offenses under Sections 43 to 76, each carrying specific penalties. Below are some key provisions:

- **Section 44:** If a person fails to provide required documents, they may be fined up to Rs. 1.5 lakh per failure.

- **Section 65**: If a person intentionally destroys a computer source document, they could face a penalty of up to Rs. 2,00,000 or imprisonment for up to three years, or both.

- **Section 66**: Any fraudulent act under Section 43 can lead to a fine up to Rs. 5,00,000 or imprisonment for up to three years, or both.

- **Section 66B**: If someone dishonestly receives stolen computer resources or communication devices, they may face a penalty of up to Rs. 1,00,000 or imprisonment for up to three years, or both.

- **Section 66C**: If a person fraudulently uses another person's electronic signature, password, or other unique identifiers, they could be fined up to Rs. 1,00,000 or imprisoned for up to three years, or both.

- **Section 66E:** If a person intentionally captures, publishes, or transmits an image of someone's private area without consent, they may be fined up to Rs. 2,00,000 or imprisoned for up to three years, or both.

These penalties are part of the broader framework to protect individuals' rights, including the right to privacy.

The right to privacy serves several important purposes.

It aids individuals in achieving self-full fillment and supports the discovery of truth. It also strengthens the ability of people to participate actively in decision-making processes. While the Constitution of India does not explicitly mention the right to privacy, it is considered an implied right under Fundamental Rights, derived from Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and liberty.

The Supreme Court of India has reinforced the right to privacy through various rulings. Additionally, this right provides a framework for maintaining a reasonable balance between societal stability and progress. It is essential for individuals to be free to form their own beliefs without undue interference.

Challenges of Digital Democracy:

1. **Misinformation and Fake News:** The proliferation of false information and fake news poses a major threat to the integrity of democratic discussions. Malicious individuals and groups exploit social media platforms to spread propaganda, manipulate public sentiment, and create divisions within society.

2. **Echo Chambers and Polarization:** Social media platforms often use algorithms that prioritize content based on users' existing views and preferences, leading to echo chambers where people are exposed only to ideas they already agree with. This results in heightened political polarization, making it difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue or build consensus.

3. **Regulatory Uncertainty**: The rapid rise of social media has outstripped the development of effective regulations, leaving policymakers to address complex challenges such as data privacy, online harassment, and content moderation. The absence of clear rules and enforcement mechanisms increases the risks associated with political discourse online.

4. **Digital Divide**: While social media is widespread, many rural and marginalized communities still lack access to the necessary digital infrastructure and skills. This digital divide deepens inequalities in political participation and representation, undermining the democratic principle of equal involvement for all citizens.

In navigating the digital landscape, these challenges highlight the need for a more balanced, inclusive, and regulated approach to digital democracy.

The Role of Social Media in Promoting Positive Political Change

1. **Media Literacy:** One of the key steps towards fostering positive political change is investing in media literacy programs. These programs can equip citizens with the skills to critically evaluate information, distinguish between credible sources and misinformation, and navigate the digital world responsibly.

2. **Transparency and Accountability:** Political parties and social media platforms must implement measures to ensure transparency and accountability. These measures can help combat the spread of misinformation, safeguard user data, and uphold ethical standards in the digital space.

3. **Regulatory Reforms**: Policymakers should work alongside industry stakeholders to create robust regulatory frameworks that strike a balance between protecting free speech and safeguarding democratic values, ensuring that public welfare is maintained without stifling open discourse.

4. **Digital Inclusion**: Addressing the digital divide is essential for ensuring inclusive political engagement. This can be achieved by increasing access to digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and creating online spaces where people from all backgrounds can participate in political discussions.

5. People now have access to a wide range of media outlets and delivery systems, each catering to diverse interests and preferences. This abundance of options has led to increased competition among media institutions, which is often seen as a factor that improves the quality of media content.

6. **The E-commerce Revolution**

   A significant portion of retail business is now conducted online, with e-commerce becoming incr**Revitalizing Democracy:**large companies have established their own websites, and the internet has also provided a platform for small businesses to operate, allowing them access to a broader customer base that they might not have reached otherwise.

7.

   The internet serves as a valuable tool for political education and information dissemination. It

allows citizens to become more informed and engaged in democratic processes, encouraging active participation in political life. Additionally, the internet holds politicians accountable, as it enables the public to more easily scrutinize their actions and hold them responsible for their decisions.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of New Media

According to James Curran and Jean Seaton (2003), the debate surrounding new media in Britain is shaped by two dominant perspectives: the Neophiliac perspective and the Cultural pessimist perspective. These views offer opposing assessments of the advantages and disadvantages of new media.

Access to Information: The internet has revolutionized access to information, making it easier to obtain a vast array of knowledge on virtually any subject. Whether for personal, academic, or professional purposes, people can now find information quickly and often at no cost, which has made new media a crucial resource.

New Networks and Connections: The internet allows individuals to form connections that would be difficult or impossible to establish through traditional media or on a local level. Social media platforms, in particular, facilitate global communication, enabling people to stay connected with family and friends worldwide via messaging, video calls, and even collaborative online activities like gaming.

Increased Consumer Choice: The rise of new media has expanded consumer choice by offering a greater variety of products, services, and content. People now have more options than ever before, allowing them to make more informed decisions and access niche markets that were previously unavailable.

Spread of Misinformation and Fake News:

One of the major challenges of new media is its role in the rapid spread of misinformation and fake news. Due to the ease with which information can be shared online, false or misleading content often circulates quickly, causing confusion, increasing polarization, and potentially manipulating public opinion.

Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles:

Social media platforms frequently create echo chambers or filter bubbles, where users are

exposed primarily to information that supports their existing beliefs. This can reinforce biases, limit diverse perspectives, and obstruct meaningful dialogue, making it difficult to foster understanding among different groups.

Privacy Concerns:
The extensive collection of personal data by new media platforms raises significant privacy issues. Often, users' data is used without their explicit consent for targeted advertising, political profiling, and other purposes. This can lead to breaches of privacy and the exploitation of personal information.

Cyber bullying and Online Harassment:

The anonymity provided by new media can encourage cyber bullying and online harassment. Vulnerable groups, such as women and minorities, are often subjected to abusive behaviour, threats, and intimidation, resulting in psychological harm and, in some cases, physical consequences.

Addiction and Mental Health Issues:

Excessive use of new media, especially social media, has been linked to addiction and mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The constant pressure to present an idealized version of oneself online and compare with others can negatively impact individuals' mental well-being.

Digital Divide:
Despite the widespread use of new media, there remains a significant digital divide in India, where some communities lack access to technology and the internet. Socioeconomic factors, geographic location, and infrastructure limitations create unequal opportunities for access to information, exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities.

Disinformation Campaigns and Manipulation:

New media platforms are susceptible to manipulation by various malicious entities, such as foreign governments, extremist groups, and interest organizations. These groups often orchestrate disinformation campaigns and use propaganda to create division, influence elections, and undermine democratic institutions.

Conclusion

the influence of social media on Indian politics today is both profound and complex. While it has facilitated greater communication, empowered citizens, and enhanced political

participation, it has also brought forth new challenges and complexities that need to be tackled. As we move forward in this digital era, it is crucial to stay cautious and critical when consuming information, while also striving to leverage the power of social media to strengthen and benefit Indian democracy.

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