



Role of Social Media in Democracy

This article is based on [“Why democracy needs social media”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 17/06/2021. It talks about the role of social media in democracy.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how [social media](#) can help average citizens and complement the efforts of the modern governments in dealing with the crisis.

Around the world, social media is making it easier for people to have a voice in government — to discuss issues, organize around causes, and hold leaders accountable.

However, due to its unregulated nature and its role in the spread of fake news, social media leads to spread of propaganda, targets minorities, destabilizes the elected governments, which all in turn compromises the spirit of democracy.

Thus, there is a need to regulate social media, in a way that strikes a balance between freedom of speech, interest of minorities, law & order and promote participation of citizens in governance.

Positive Impact of Social Media on Democracy

- **Digital Democracy:** Democratic values can evolve when people have freedom of expression. In this way, social media enables the concept of digital democracy through these platforms of freedom.
- **Setting Accountability:** Social media acts as an instrument that can question the seemingly invincible governments, make them accountable and bring sustained change driven by people beyond one vote in years.
- **Giving Voice:** Social media has enormous power to keep people informed. This can be seen, when social media played a critical role in the Arab Spring in places like Tunisia, it was heralded as a technology for liberation.
- **Civic Engagement:** Social media’s implications for civic engagement are profound, as many people tend to discuss & debate news over these platforms.
 - It has long been observed that when people discuss the news, they’re more likely to be involved in their community, whether by volunteering or reaching out to elected officials.

Negative Impact of Social Media on Democracy

- **Political Polarization:** One of the most common criticisms of social media is that it creates echo chambers where people only see viewpoints they agree with — further driving us apart.
 - As unprecedented numbers of people channel their political energy through this medium, it’s being used in unforeseen ways with societal repercussions that were never anticipated.
- **Propaganda Setting:** According to Google Transparency Report, political parties mostly in the last two years have spent around \$800 million (Rs 5,900 crore) on election ads.

- Micro-targeting can enable dishonest campaigns to spread toxic discourse without much consequence.
- **Foreign Interference:** Around the US 2016 election, Russian entities set up and promoted fake Pages on Facebook to influence public sentiment — essentially using social media as an information weapon.
 - In this way, social media enables nation-states to use these platforms to wage a cyberwar intended to divide society.
- **Fake News:** Social media gives people more voice and can sometimes be used, by anyone, to spread hoaxes and misinformation.
- **Unequal Participation:** Social media also distorts policymakers' perception of public opinion. This is because it is believed that social media platforms tend to represent every walk of life, but not everyone is using their voice equally.

Conclusion

If there's one fundamental truth about social media's impact on democracy it's that it amplifies human intent — both good and bad. At its best, it allows us to express ourselves and take action. At its worst, it allows people to spread misinformation and corrode democracy.

Drishti Mains Question

If there's one fundamental truth about social media's impact on democracy it's that it amplifies human intent — both good and bad. Comment.