



Social Media and Politics in India

This editorial is based on [“How Twitter became the New Medium for Diplomacy”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 20/07/2022. It talks about the role of social media in polity and governance in India.

For Prelims: Social Media, Covid Pandemic, Political Polarisation, Google Transparency Report, Election Commission of India, Model Code of Conduct

For Mains: Impact of Politicisation of Social Media, Recent Social media Regulations by EC of India

Human history **from the Stone Age to Metal Age is now in the Digital age** with the most promising tool-**social media. It mirrors the real world.**

Public opinion is the currency of democracy. Social media platforms are increasingly becoming the **primary ground for public discourse and mobilisation of public opinion**, a tool where people are able to talk about the issues of day to day life and also of national importance.

Social media today is no longer just an innocent space to connect with friends and family. Instead, it has metamorphosed into becoming an **influential space for political activity** and creating a new **political dialogue.**

How does Social Media Benefit Indian Politics?

- **Bringing Awareness to the Masses:** Historically, the **people were never as aware as they are now about government policies.**
 - **Government outreach** is increasing through the effective use of social media through different **social media campaigns** spreading awareness among the people.
 - As an example, social media was highly effective in promoting **precautionary awareness and mobilising leads for medicines** during the **Covid pandemic.**
- **Bridging the Gap:** Social Media has been instrumental in bringing people and their representatives close.
 - The **communication barriers** that did not allow people to interact with the leaders have **reduced significantly because of social media.**
 - **Politicians are reaching out to their supporters on social media.**
 - They are making sure to **keep the public in the loop through their engagements** and posts on social media.
 - It has increased the ability for ordinary citizens to take part in the political process.
 - Besides this, social media has been actively used for **influencing diplomatic relations between India and its friendly countries.**
- **Reducing Barriers:** These platforms present a cheap and low-barrier channel of people-politician

communication, by potentially **intensifying [political democracy](#) by allowing many to enter into political races.**

- **Improved Analytical System:** As compared to traditional methods of public opinion measurement, **social media allows time and cost effective data collection and analysis** with less human effort.
 - **[Data analytics](#) has evolved itself to become the brain of every election campaign.** It helps the election campaign committee understand the voters better and **align their policies to their needs.**

What are the Negative Impact of Politicisation of Social Media?

- **Political Polarisation:** One of the most common criticisms of social media is that it **creates echo chambers where people only see viewpoints they agree with.**
 - The **campaigns sometimes spark religious and social tensions** in different parts of the country.
 - Social media has enabled a style of **populist politics**, which on the negative side allows **[hate speech](#) and extreme speech** to thrive in digital spaces that are unregulated, **particularly in regional languages.**
- **Propaganda Setting:** According to **[Google Transparency Report](#)**, **political parties** mostly in the last two years **have spent around 800 million dollars (Rs 5,900 crore) on election ads.**
 - Micro-targeting can enable dishonest campaigns to spread toxic discourse without much consequence.
- **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's voice is heard equally.**
- **Political Tactics:** The Political parties with the help of social media are able to get information regarding **voters likes and dislikes** and **further manipulate them, especially the Swing Voters, whose views can be changed by manipulating information.**
 - Social media gives people more voice and can sometimes be used, by anyone, to spread hoaxes and **misinformation.**
 - **Social media has made people better informed but also easier to manipulate.**

Misinformation v/s Disinformation v/s Mal-information:

- Most of the time Fake news conflates three different notions: misinformation, disinformation, and mal -information.
- Misinformations are false information, but when a person conveys it, believes that it is true and shares.
- Disinformation is those which are shared intentionally by a person after knowing that it is not true; false information which is intended to mislead.
- Information that is based on reality but imposes harm on a person, organisation, or country is termed as mal-information.

What Should be the Approach Moving Forward?

- **Law to Facilitate Transparency:** A meaningful framework to **combat disinformation** at scale must be built on the understanding that it is a political problem.
 - **Transparency and Regulations** need to be brought to bring governance of speech **within the ambit of the democratic process** and to control the **weaponization of social media.**
 - It should also include **safeguards for [user privacy](#)** since **platforms are a repository of the private information of citizens.**
- **Structural Reforms in Platforms: Blanket immunity for platforms as intermediaries no longer makes sense** since platforms are far more interventionist with user content.

- Therefore, platform accountability should be linked to their distribution model.
- Furthermore, Platforms can make it possible for the **users to make an informed choice regarding which feed to subscribe or opt-out of.**
- **Checks on Use of Personal data:** Regulations should be maintained to ensure checks on use of personal data in the context of electoral campaigns complies with national laws.
- **Maintaining a Level Playing Field: Democracy, in its true spirit, demands equal opportunities** for all parties, and **free & fair elections give all parties equal opportunities.**
 - Strict norms for use of social media for political purposes is the need of the hour so that **minority political campaigns are given equal attention.**
 - The [Election Commission of India](#) and its [Model Code of Conduct](#) go to great lengths to make sure that one party doesn't have an undue advantage over another just because it is in power.

Drishti Mains Question

Social media has greatly influenced the political dynamics in India. Comment.

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