



Mains Practice Question

Q. The rise of digital media has reshaped the traditional fabric of Indian society. Discuss the impact of social media on social behavior, political engagement, and identity formation in contemporary India. (250 words)

07 Jul, 2025 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach:

- Introduce the answer by briefing about the rise of social media and impact on Indian society
- Give its impact on social behavior, political engagement, and identity formation separately.
- Suggest measures to strengthen regulation of social media
- Conclude with a relevant quote.

Introduction:

The rise of social media has dramatically transformed Indian society, influencing how individuals interact, engage politically, and shape their identities. With over **600 million internet users**, platforms like **Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp** have not only revolutionized communication but have also become tools for **mobilization, social change, and political discourse**.

Body:

Impact of Social Media on Social Behavior:

- **Transformation of Communication Patterns:** Social media has revolutionized communication by making it instantaneous and widespread.
 - Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook groups have led to the rise of virtual communities, enabling people to stay connected across geographies.
 - However, this shift has led to a decline in face-to-face interactions and the development of digital dependencies.
- **Rise of Social Influence and Trends:** Social media fosters peer influence through likes, shares, and comments.
 - It has given rise to a culture of "virality" where social behavior is often driven by online trends and influencers. This influences consumption patterns, lifestyles, and opinions, especially among younger generations.
 - Trends like #VeganMovement, which gained significant momentum through Twitter and Facebook, highlighted societal issues, influencing social norms.
- **Degradation of Social Skills:** While digital media has brought convenience, it has also eroded traditional social skills. Younger generations often find it more difficult to engage in in-person conversations, which affects their interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence.
 - Studies have shown that the **overuse of social media in India has contributed to a rise in mental health issues, especially among teenagers**, like anxiety and depression, due to cyberbullying or online comparison.

Impact of Social Media on Political Engagement:

- **Amplification of Political Voices:** Social media platforms have democratized political discourse, allowing individuals from all backgrounds to express their opinions.
 - This has given a voice to marginalized groups and helped in amplifying political issues that would otherwise go unnoticed.
 - The **2020 Farmer's movement** utilized social media extensively to mobilize support, with Facebook and Twitter being used for organizing protests and raising awareness.
- **Political Polarization:** While social media has increased political engagement, it has also contributed to a rise in polarization.
 - Algorithms on platforms like Facebook and Twitter often amplify content that aligns with users' existing beliefs, leading to the creation of echo chambers.
 - The **2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections** saw the strategic use of social media by political parties to target voters with tailored content, often polarizing opinions and deepening divisions.
- **Misinformation and Fake News:** The spread of fake news, misinformation, and hate speech has become a significant challenge on social media.
 - The WhatsApp forwards during **the 2019 general elections, particularly relating to fake news about political candidates**, played a significant role in shaping voter behavior.

Impact of Social Media on Identity Formation:

- **Creation of Digital Identities:** Social media allows individuals to present curated versions of themselves, leading to the formation of digital identities.
 - These identities are often more polished and idealized compared to real-life personalities. This influences self-esteem and how individuals perceive their social status.
 - Platforms like **Instagram encourage** users to share photos and videos that project a certain lifestyle, which often leads to a sense of competition and comparison, especially among youth.
- **Affirmation of Social and Cultural Identity:** Social media platforms have become spaces where people assert and reinforce their social, cultural, and religious identities. Communities can share and celebrate their heritage, leading to a greater sense of belonging and solidarity.
 - The rise of **hashtags like #DalitLivesMatter** has provided a platform for marginalized communities to discuss issues related to caste discrimination and advocate for social justice.
- **Influence of Globalization on Local Identities:** While social media connects individuals globally, it has also led to the erosion of local cultures in some cases. Western ideals, lifestyles, and cultural norms often dominate online spaces, leading to a shift in the self-identity of young people in India.
 - The **increasing popularity of Western fashion trends, music (such as K-pop), and lifestyle choices is influencing the aspirations and identities of Indian youth**, particularly in urban areas.

Considering the profound impact of social media on social behavior, political engagement, and identity formation, it is crucial to **implement effective measures to regulate and enhance its positive impact while mitigating its potential harm**. The following measures can help achieve this balance:

- **Comprehensive Social Media Regulation through a Digital Code of Ethics:** A detailed Digital Code of Ethics should be introduced as per **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** to ensure platforms adhere to ethical content-sharing standards.
 - This should build on the **Shreya Singhal ruling**, ensuring that any regulation of online speech remains within the confines of the Constitution and does not lead to arbitrary censorship.
- **Fastracking Implementation of the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPB):** It would ensure that personal information is collected, stored, and shared only with informed consent, thereby enhancing privacy and preventing misuse, which is crucial in today's data-driven world.
- **Mandatory Digital Literacy and Cyber Ethics Curriculum in Schools:** Introducing **mandatory digital literacy programs in educational curricula** can equip young people with the necessary skills to navigate social media responsibly.

- Teaching students about online ethics, privacy protection, and digital security will create a generation of informed users who are less susceptible to online manipulation and more responsible in their online engagement.
- **Stronger Enforcement of Accountability for Algorithmic Manipulation:** Social media platforms often manipulate user feeds through algorithms that promote sensationalist or divisive content.
 - Regulations should **enforce transparency in algorithms, mandating platforms to disclose how content is prioritized** and how user data is used to shape online experiences.
 - This would help mitigate the dangers of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and the amplification of harmful content.

Conclusion:

Social media has brought about transformative changes in Indian society. While it has enhanced social behavior, political engagement, and identity formation, it has also presented challenges like polarization, misinformation, and the erosion of traditional norms. **"The more we elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate."** Thus, it is essential to navigate the digital space responsibly, ensuring that its benefits outweigh the pitfalls.

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