NEW MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN STRENGTHENING OF DEMOCRACY AT THE GRASSROOT LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

There has been stupendous growth and development in the field of information and communication technologies in the world. India is not exception in this regard. India has made outstanding progress in the IT sector. Subsequently, the social media has got a compatible infrastructure to grow manifold. Besides, India is an ideal market for the growth of social media. All major social media platforms get plenty of fuel in the country to run. Social media has grown comprehensively in the country. Subsequently, it is not confined within the ambit of communication. Instead, the social media impact every section of society. Earlier, social media was thought to be a seat of entertainment for the urban middle class but it is now being accessed by different people found in the Indian social spectrum. Social media is voicing the common masses specially the marginalized communities. These people find the social media platform to raise their voices. It is subsequently considered to empower the marginalized communities in the country. There have been several incidents when the social media was credited to raise the voice of marginalized communities. The present paper aims to explore the role of social media in the context of empowerment of marginalized communities in the country.

Keywords: *IT, ICT, social media, social spectrum, entertainment, empowerment, communities.*

INTRODUCTION

Technology has always been precursor of introducing transformation in the society. The last decades of the previous century were the time when the information and communication technologies have grown manifold. The growth of ICTs has resulted into the development of internet and social media. Social media is the new age media which is based on user generated contents. In fact, this media is a platform where the users can share their contents irrespective of their boundaries like personal or political. Social media is defined as a communication channel based on internet which provides different types of opportunities to its users for the sharing of information in different form like video, audio etc. (Marriam – Webster, 2011). They (social media) can also be defined as the communication systems which are based on the modern information and communication technologies (Baghel, 2015). Social media has emerged as a powerful media system in the world today. This engages the people of all walks of life to share their common belief and thoughts on different social, economic and political issues worldwide. Social media covers large number of issues ranging

from personal to professional. In modern day era of globalization, social medica is facilitating the formation and reformation of public opinion on different issues (Akar, 2011). Social media actually generates a conversation among its users on different issues ranging from personal to political. The users share various information in the form of text, visuals, photograph etc. and discuss on various issues simultaneously. This all won't have been possible in the absence of information and communication infrastructure that has facilitated the birth of social media in the world of mass communication. Today, this media has become an essential part of life of virtual communities without borders physical or political. The most important feature of social media is that the gatekeeper is completely absent in the communication process through social media. Subsequently, the people can communicate here the way they want unlike the other mass media where the control is one of the most important determinants of the contents to be published. (Roy, 2015). The social media has become very popular aal over the world. Because of being users friendly, this mass media attracts the masses from all walks of life irrespective of their individual identities. At the level of its inception, the social media was confined to the technocrats due to typical use of communication technologies with great knowledge and understanding of application. With the passages of time, the social media evolved into the user-friendly technologies. This feature made the social media more popular. The big difference between the social media and the mainstream media is that this media is cyclical in structure where the receiver of the messages is not the passive recipients of the messages. In fact, he also participated in the communication process (Taprial, Kanwar, 2012).

MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Media is called the fourth pillar of democracy. In the democratic set up, mass media play an important role in the mobilization and participation process of the people. The idea of democracy is the most popular political trend in the global spectrum today.

Media is considered as the watchdog of democracy where the role of mass media is not only to provide the valuable information to the people living in the political set up but also to help them in the development of opinion specially in a multi- party - political systems like India. Mass media also facilitates the logical debates and discussions on various popular issues of national and international importance. There is no doubt that the media is considered as the most trusted source of information in the entire infosphere. Direct democracy is not possible practically due to the huge size of states today. That is why the representative democracy is the most important form of government in the world today. Mass media plays a big role in letting the people participate in the political processes. This subsequently guarantees the success a political set up (Media & Democracy, 2015). A free mass media is considered as an essential aspect of a democratic set up. The mass media play dual role in the political systems. On one side, this provides the information to the people and facilitates the formation of their opinion. On the other, hand this maintains a check on the instrumentalists of government in the state as well (USAID, 1999).

Objective of the Study- Following are the objective of this study-

- To understand the social media penetration and its role in democratic system.

- To understand the role of social media in the political process in democracies.

- To understand how the social media has been helpful to strengthen democracies at the grassroot level in India.

Research Methodology- The present study uses the secondary data for the purpose of study. The relevant data has been obtained from the sources like newspapers, websites and journals. Having been collated from various sources, the same has been analysed for the purpose of finding out the conclusions.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY- AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

There have been significant researches in the last two decades by the scholars. These have been focussing on different issues in the field of society, economy and polity. The researchers also focussed on the political communication particularly (Boulianne 2015). Social media has impacted democratic polities significantly all over the world. Earlier, the traditional media was criticised to have biased approach. This was also the speculation that the public opinion is injected into the minds and hearts of the people. This stereotype public opinion was used for the purpose of maintaining the political and commercial interest The mainstream mass media was criticized to have more faith on the government and corporate rather than public interest. The agenda setting became the rage of the day. The new mass media is different from these abnormalities. The people in the communication process are not merely the passive recipients of the messages only. They actually participate in the communication process. In fact, they initiate the communication as well. Because of the emergence of new mass media, the communication process has been cyclical in place of linear. The new mass media follows the Charles E Osgood model which says that the communication is the cyclical process and very participatory in nature. The new media has given birth to the free flow of independent news and views in the infosphere.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRENGTHENED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Technological innovation in the field of information and communication technologies has resulted into the birth of internet and subsequently social media. Earlier advancement in the information and communication arena resulted into the concentration of media ownership. The common masses were broadly supposed to be the passive recipients of the messages from both political parties

as well as commercial entities in the world. With the emergence of new media, the common people are also the generator of information and they can also initiate the communication process. The Internet has been playing an important role in imparting the knowledge on different social, economic and political developments. The new mass media actually engages the users as well as encourage them to be involved in many political developments. The Internet is also important to organise the political debates and discussions which subsequently result into political participation of the people. Initially, the Internet was a one-way system of communication for political entities to inform and educate the public (Emruli & Bača, 2011).

NEW MEDIA FACILITATES POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

New mass media is facilitating the people's communication at various levels- horizontal as well as vertical. During the Jasmine Revolution when the mainstream mass media was controlled by the government strictly the social media played a big role in the providing the opportunity to the people to talk among themselves. This was very important because this communication in the long run resulted into the participation and mobilization of the people. The communication helped in ousting the decades old regimes from many counties in the Arab World. The new media has introduced the drastic changes in the political communication processes. There have been significant changes in the communication processes due to the use of new mass media by the leaders and the government institutions all over the world. The new mass media have also impacted the participation in the electoral process and the citizens 'engagement (Owen).

NEW MEDIA INCREASED POLITICAL AWARENESS

The new mass media is based on citizen's participation. This is the feature that distinguishes the new media from the mainstream mass media.

The new media functions on the people generated contents. These are the users who contribute to the new mass media spectrum that actually fuel the functioning of new mass media. Since the people started to use the new media, there has been significant rise of the people's awareness all over the world. The political candidates also access the voters through the new mass media. In 2008, the US President Barrack Obama used the social media to access the voters. This trend is not confined merely to the USA, instead the leaders in in the totalitarianism regimes are also using the new mass media.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The major drawback of the mainstream mass media has been that they inject the message to the receivers who subsequently have no role in the communication process except to receive the messages. The new media facilitated the people's participation in the political communication process. In these circumstances, the people started to participate actively in debates and discussions aiming to create and recreate public opinion.

CONCLUSION

This is clear that in the modern world, role if mass media is significant irrespective of political systems. The new mass media have played very important role in the formation of public opinion which is not imposed form outside instead it's generated the self-crafted contents in the digital infosphere. In the political spectrum, social media have strengthened the people's participation in the communication process. That is why democracies in particularly have been empowered. The social media has also facilitated the participatory democracy. The availability of smart phones and the affordable data,

the penetration of new media has reached at the grass root levels.

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