International Journal of Applied Research

Dr. Manju Chaudhary
Associate Professor,
Department of Political
Science, Commissionerate
Higher Education, Jaipur,
Rajasthan, India

Role of social media in politics

Dr. Manju Chaudhary

Abstract
Social Media today is an interface between society and individual. The digital platform has changed the traditional view of engaging with politics. Anybody possessing a digital gadget today is content consumer and creator as well. This act of consumption and creation impacts our day-to-day politics. Movements like Occupy Movement in U.S.A., Brexit in UK show digital arena is becoming a new space for public discourse and political struggles. There is more to social media shaping politics i.e., usage of social media generated data of an individual or group by political parties to target voters. In this context 'likes generated' content is extracted without consent and big tech algorithms' surround user with echo chamber information, thereby creating recipe for misinformation and sow seed of a polarized society.

Keywords: Social media, digital, movement, big tech, misinformation, polarization

Introduction
Politics according to Hannah Arendt, is an act of reclaiming public space. The form of public space has changed from Aristotelian view of restrictive public space devoid of women and slaves to 21st century digital space that accessed by anyone who is in a possession of a digital instrument. Internet, therefore in this digital arena can be a space of free expression or repression. Be it democratic or authoritarian regime, usage of social media either for outreach to voters or propaganda to present clean image, is rampant. Engagement of individual and civil society in politics both at international level has made world flat like support for climate movement Friday for Future.

Social media platforms began to rise in popularity in the mid-2000. They play a significant role in converting street movements into large movements. In India social media showed its power during anti-corruption movement 2012 and the Nirbhaya movement.

Social media provides citizen opportunity to mingle with myriad viewpoints. This helps society to widen its mindsets and create harmonious public spheres. However, it also creates possibility of "dissonant public spheres", that translates into deep polarization societally and politically.

Since, the advent of digitization wave social media has played crucial role in political agenda setting. Political players from various countries like India, United States, United Kingdom have effectively used digital machinery to gain access about user engagement with news.

Click-bait mechanism to Big Tech's algorithm use targeted advertising to generate revenue by monetizing user data generated on social media. This then helps political parties to chart out campaigns needed to be undertaken to maximize their voter base.

This paper covers aspects like individual engagement in politics via social media, technical usage of social media to win election, spread propaganda, Big Tech role in amplifying divisive information.

Engagement with Social Media
Manuel Castells's work Communication and Power (2009) argues that social media is the logical form of communication. He insists on real-world connection where people get cyber-activated to collaborate in an "occupied space", referring to the parks, squares to organize and take action. Castells connects the dots between role of social media and individual engagement in popular struggles like social movements. Iceland's Kitchenware Revolution, Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, Egypt's Tahrir Square Protests and Occupy Wall Street are successful examples of multimodal networking.

Correspondence
Dr. Manju Chaudhary
Associate Professor,
Department of Political
Science, Commissionerate
Higher Education, Jaipur,
Rajasthan, India

Twitter retweets, Facebook sharing posts by individuals served as key informational routers. Social media has transformed journalism into conversation between individuals coming from different background like actors, activists, bloggers [1].

According to study by Tufekci and Wilson (2012) that examined social media role in Arab Spring opined that digital platform played central role to mold decisions of individuals regarding being part of protests to logistics. Protest in Egypt fostered by social media led to resignation of President Mubarak.

Social media conjoins people around their causes and concerns. Social media brings people closer in collective action. Clay Shirky notes that a woman found her lost phone with help of technology.

In book Dragonfly Effect, Jennifer Aaker and Andy Smith argue social media can effect social change. As dragonflies can fly in any direction with help of coordinated action of four wings, so is social media through grabbing, attention, engagement, taking action. An Indian Company Paper Boat came up with digital campaign to upload image of paper boats on social media, that translated into company donating 20 rupees towards children education for every image shared.

Social media helps to frame public opinion. Like it did in Anna Hazare movement on corruption. Creating awareness is the task of media, social media takes it to a notch above by holding government accountability via running hashtags and retweeting on Twitter or sharing stories on Instagram.

Authoritarian regime like China, Russia has created their own infrastructure to monitor and censor content. This points out that regime critical of its criticism curb free speech.

Social Media and Mainstream Politics
The term "riding the wave" has gained prominence in political discourse. Political Parties have become responsive to the trends on social media. This provides politicians with an opportunity to appear concerned and responsive for the public. There are three recent case studies that elaborates the role of social media and politics i.e., India, U.S.A and U.K.

India
2014 elections in India were pathbreaking. During this election Narendra Modi emerged as India's Obama. The traditional ways of sending messages, recorded calls and public gatherings was not seen much. Social media platforms were used to reach out to constituents like never before.

An interesting report published in April 2013 by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). Report found out that Facebook users have a huge impact over the results of the polls in 160 of India's 543 constituencies. Youth of the country is the reason for such occurrence. As per the report, 50% of population is below 25 age group and Secondly 65 % is below 35 age group [2]. Youth age group is either college-going or corporate multi-national professionals.

This youth is distant from 9 pm prime time or FM. Their commuting time and tech savvy habits brought them closer to digital media like youtube, twitter, FB feed that acts interface for news, current trends in politics. Burgeoning youth population in India are themselves content creators of news that are sponsored by political parties to promote their party ideas.

Tech Platforms and Politics of Polarization
U.S.A
Tech Platforms in America have contributed to extreme polarization. Though it is not the originator but key facilitator intensifying political sectarianism. According to Joseph Raz social media, "perverts the way that person reaches decisions, forms preferences, or adopts goals." This distortion, too, is an "invasion of autonomy" and undermining of democracy.

There is finding that design of platform algorithm is such that it amplifies divisive content to increase user engagement that increases polarization. However, it is important to point out that social media platforms do not create echo chambers 'feed', their main intention is to capture user time on platform to augment paid advertising.

U.K
U. K's referendum on Brexit delves into the issue further. It highlights the consternation that took on social media amongst the Remainers and Leavers. In the digital age, so-called online social movements have gained momentum, enabling broader mobilisation through less rigid forms of organisation and affiliation [3]. Facebook architecture is well suited to development of polarized communities beyond formal party politics, creating so-called 'filter bubbles' in which users communicate in ideologically segregated communities [4].

The 'politics of division' seen in U.K. has its roots in Cambridge Analytica Scandal, a political consulting firm which employed counterfeit measures to extract personal data of more than 50 million Britons from Facebook. This data, which was extracted without the knowledge and consent of the individuals, was then used to tailor Brexit campaign.

The Brexit and election of Donald Trump were supported by social media ads financed by dark money, mass data-harvesting and targeted ads. This has long term impact on the polity of Britain and U.S. If platforms can be easily used to spread disinformation through social media comments it might result into far-right and white supremacist movements gaining strength and creating a leadership vacuum.

Conclusion
Social media is omnipresent in our lives, politics, mass struggles. It is not doubtful to believe what Michael Schudson said, "the revolution will be tweeted". If social media can be used for grassroot mobilisation, personal connection so can be an effective tool for government surveillance. Beyond this it is battleground of ideas, misbeliefs leading to manipulations. Thus, social media needs regulation. Regulation to end algorithmic manipulation. Governments can intervene to roll out 'content moderation policies', benchmarks on categorisation of harmful content and levying of fines in case of breach. Social media platforms can adhere to certain morality codes like preventing repression of genuine freedom of expression and develop self-regulatory body to police themselves.

Next big thing in this arena is to stem polarization, though difficult. Polarization hollows out a society internally. It breeds cancel culture.

Digital order, though gave individual autonomy to connect, like and share according to one's beliefs. However, it has made societies polarized between "us" vs "them", "alternative facts" vs fake news and fact-checkers of various

political colours which has contributed in deteriorating quality of democratic life.

Footnotes
1. Kidd, Dustin and McIntosh, Keith essay on social media and social movements. How Technology be leveraged to scale up social movements.
2. IAMAI Report
3. Cyberactivism research by McCaughey and Ayers.
4. On online echo chambers and public opinion by Flaxman, Goel, Rao.

References
1. Aaker, Jennifer, & Smith, Andy, The Dragonfly Effect, Jossey-Bass; c2010.
2. Castells, Manuel, Communication Power, Oxford: Oxford University Press; c2009.
3. Flaxman S, Goel S, Rao JM. Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption, Public Opinion Quarterly. 2016;80(1):298-320.
4. Kidd Dustin, McIntosh Keith. Social Media and Social Movements, Sociology Compass. 2016;10(9):785-794.
5. legalserviceindia.com
6. McCaughey M, Ayers MD. Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice, Routledge; c2013.