

ESSAY #5

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Digital Democracy: Social Media and Political Participation

Outline:

1: Introduction

Thesis Statement:

Digital democracy has become a new normal and ensures political participation via social media. However, it has posed certain challenges which affect the smooth functioning of democracy. Some careful measures can ensure the smoothness of digital democracy and enhance political participation through social media platforms.

2: Understanding the key variables: digital democracy, social media and political participation

3: How democracy has changed across the world in the wake of digitalization?

4: How does digital democracy ensure political participation via social media?

(a) Legislations: are being influenced by the public which lead to political engagement

(b) Trends of protests have been revolutionized and transformed - a valuable feature of digital democracy

(c) Public opinion is highlighted on social media forcing government to become more responsive in nature

(d) Electoral turnout has been increased manifold with the rise of digital democracy

(e) Ensures quick accountability, transparency in government functions and equilibrium in government policies.

5: Challenges posed by digital democracy to smooth functioning of government and productive political participation: Case of Pakistan in focus:-

(a) Can be used as a tool of hybrid warfare thereby maligning actual political participation - Disinformation campaigns

(b) Social media is manipulated to make and break governments frequently - unchecked freedom of expression

(c) Thoughts of public are more prone to be radicalised by misinformation by political leadership and private entities - polarized politics

(d) Digital participation does not

reach the whole population; due to the lack of digital infrastructure.

6: Suggestive measures to reap maximum benefits from digital democracy via social media to ensure healthy and maximum political participation:

(a) To introduce licensing and mandatory registration requirements for companies providing encryption services

(b) New legislative measures be taken to mandate technology platforms to cooperate with law enforcement agencies to improve the flow of issue information.

(c) Educating masses by social campaigns to promote digital democracy in far-flung areas of country and inculcate balanced approach in them.

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Notes

(d) Breaking the monopoly of
Tech giants to make the system
more diverse, inclusive and
pro-democratic.

7: Conclusion

Essay:

Democracy has been through several transformations in history to reaffirm its core principles — “the sovereignty of equal citizens and the accountability of unequal rulers”. Its scale has grown from city-states to nation-states. In the history of mankind, the twentieth century was one of the great successes for democracy with the rise of information technology. Democracy has now been transformed into digital democracy which has become a new normal and ensures political participation via social media. However, it has posed certain challenges which affect the smooth functioning of democracy. In this regard, some candid measures, if taken timely, can ensure the smoothness of digital democracy's functioning and enhance political participation through social media platforms. It does so by enhancing political

engagement of masses in legislative measures of a country. Moreover, it has changed the trends of protests and increased the electoral turn-out manifold. It has ensured that public opinion is being highlighted on social media thus making government more inclusive and responsible in nature. Quick accountability and transparency maintain equilibrium in government policies which is better ensured by digital democracy. However, optimistic, digital democracy and use of social media to improve governance and enhance political participation have been partly proven wrong by the disruptive rise of disinformation campaigns leading to hybrid warfare and unchecked freedom of expression. It often leads to polarized politics by inculcating radical ideas in the minds of public ending into social turmoil and political instability. Pakistan is also no exception to it.

Notwithstanding this, certain suggestive

measures could be taken to reap maximum benefits from digital democracy by licensing and registering companies which provide encryption services. New legislative measures and educating masses by social campaigns can also go long way in the right direction. This can help increase public participation in the democratic process and give a greater voice to under-represented groups.

Digital democracy, also known as electronic or e-democracy, is the use of information and communication technologies to enhance and, in some cases, replace the representative democracy. It is a form of government in which all adult citizens are presumed to be eligible to participate equally in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. On the other hand, social media refers to the means

of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Political participation refers to voluntary activities undertaken by the mass public to influence public policy, either directly or indirectly. Digital democracy, through the use of social media platforms, helps enhance political participation and democratic engagement.

Democracy has changed across the world in the wake of digital transformation and revolution. Most countries around the world understand that technology is a tool used to improve efficiency and cultivate stronger democratic processes. Administrative processes have been digitized; Electronic voting is one of such myriad of examples of change in democratic procedures. Furthermore, it has endorsed a better

and faster political information exchange, public argumentation and involvement in decision-making. Social media has become an empowerment tool to encourage youth to participate in elections. A clear example is 2016 United States Presidential elections and how Donald Trump executed most of his policies. Hence, digital revolution is changing many aspects of democracy and is growing by leaps and bounds.

Digital democracy ensures political participation by influencing legislation and enhanced political engagement via the use of social media platform. It has the ability to engage in real-time debates and discussions as it allows quick and easy communication. It, thus, make it possible for individuals to engage in political discussions and debates. It helps form a dynamic and interactive

political process, where individuals can have their say on important issues. A good instance of it is a legislation "Zainab Alexi Bill, 2019" being passed by the Parliament of Pakistan. It defines the system of one window operations to notify the public and recover kidnapped children in Pakistan. It was through the use of social media that legislature took steps in the right direction.

In the same vein, trends of protests have been revolutionized which is a valuable feature of digital democracy. People project their grievances on social media platforms and yell at government policies and actions. Such platforms provide a huge canvas for relatively spontaneous, flexible and continuous civil engagement in political matters. Authoritarianism has no place in participative governance.

System which could only be achieved through e-democracy.

An instance can bring home this claim's validation. Arab Spring, which occurred in the early 2010, in the Arab world, was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions. These social media became an important tool for mobilizing citizens. Thus, protests are the beauty of a democratic society and digital revolution has expanded its scope manifold.

To add, public opinion is highlighted on social media forcing government to become more responsive. Through e-participation, advanced political debates take place and people can be informed of the government and its policies through such forums of communication. The main methods are sites where citizens can raise concerns with the government directly and make

government more responsive and active towards the public. The best example of it is the "Petition Website" in the United Kingdom. Here any citizen may create or support a petition and it must be responded by the UK parliament. Politicians and civil servants are, in this way, able to track and tackle the most important topics thereby ensuring political participation.

Furthermore, electoral turnout has increased with the rise of digital democracy. Digital participation is unlikely to lead anywhere without the ability to easily vote on topics. For citizens to be more active in participating in government, there needs to be the ability to engage directly and more frequently. Online voting is the only realistic method with which citizens could consistently and

easily participate. It results in higher voter turnout for elections as it is safer, more efficient, much faster and far better for the political smoothness and stability.

By the use of gadgets such as Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), voting process has become very easy and effective. Hence, digitalization has benefited democratic procedures in unprecedented manner.

More importantly, digital democracy ensures quick accountability and transparency in government functioning. It also ensures equilibrium in governmental policies. Digital democracy and social media increase the transparency of decision making and empower the public to monitor their government's activities. It holds politicians accountable for their acts and policies ensuring public accountability. In this way, citizens interact

with elected and appointed government officials. A case study of municipal government in Ontario, Canada, describes how a virtual public accountability forum emerged and functioned based on social media data. It brings home the fact that social media can facilitate new channels of interaction between citizens and public officials. Hence, accountability and transparency is ensured through e-democracy and social media platforms.

However, there are certain challenges posed by digital democracy to smooth functioning of democracy; one of which is the threat of hybrid warfare. It can be used as a tool of hybrid warfare thereby maligning actual political participation through disinformation campaigns. These platforms are often used to spread false or misleading information, which can

have serious consequences for any nation. It is used to unleash hybrid warfare, a potential threat war ~~is~~ can devastate the fabric of any democratic nation. Pakistan is currently faced by the threat of hybrid war. It has minacious repercussions for Pakistan. "Our enemies know that they cannot beat us fair and square, and thus, they have subjected us to cruel hybrid warfare." These words of former army chief General Bajwa bring home the fact that Pakistan is faced by the threat of hybrid war due to disinformation campaigns of enemies.

In the same vein, social media is being manipulated to make and break governments frequently due to unchecked freedom of expression. Freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental right of people of a democratic nation, it should have justifiable

Consequences due to the use of it can unleash. Authoritarians and propagandists manipulate digital media to undermine democracy. As festively demonstrated by Emily Bazelon, New York Times Magazine writer, "lies often go viral faster than truth." False content moves through the internet unchecked. In 2009 presidential elections in Iran led a brutal crackdown on the protesters, killing dozens due to the threat being posed by such unhindered freedom of expression of Iranian public. Therefore, it can be safely asserted that e-democracy and social media can break governments frequently unleashing anarchy and chaos due to unbridled freedom of speech and expression.

In the same vein, thoughts of public are more prone to be radicalized by misinformation being projected by political leadership and private entities. It leads to

polarisation of politics. The gradual absence of reason and evidence from debates has widened the divide in the society. The fabricated and fragmented social fabric of society is due to the radicalization of masses by misinformation being imposed by political leaders. Pakistan's recent political polarization has opened prospects for an integrated society. It is due to electronic gadgets and social media's unbridled use for such purposes that the social structure of the country suffers the likelihood of national cohesiveness. Thus, it is certain that polarized politics gets its roots where technological advancement and social media is manipulated for personal gains, like in Pakistan.

Not only polarisation of politics, but also lack of digital infrastructure hinders the reach of whole population to fair

and smooth democratic functioning. It does not reach the whole population of the country. Therefore, whole public is not represented in political structure and functions of the country. Rural areas lack the digital infrastructure necessary for regular digital participation. In countries like Pakistan, it is not only the technical inability to participate, many people themselves lack the technical knowledge or desire to participate with the government digitally. Women are especially barred from such inclusive participation. Not every citizen has a smartphone, computer, or even a stable connection of internet. Therefore, it can be said that digital democracy's benefits cannot be reaped by whole population in true manner.

Notwithstanding this, on the flip side, there are certain measures which needs to be taken to reap maximum benefits

from digital democracy via the use of social media. It will ultimately enhance political participation. There is a need to introduce proper licensing and mandatory registration requirements for companies providing encryption services. It will tackle the menace of disinformation and propagandist campaigns. In the long term, it will help reduce the pernicious threats of hybrid warfare faced by the country. Countries like Vietnam, which in 2015 established the Law on Network Information, secured the companies trading in civil encryption goods to obtain special business licences. Pakistan can also follow the footsteps of Vietnam and other such countries to help secure itself from scourge of misinformation campaigns by proper licensing and registration systems.

In addition to that, new legislative measures need to be taken to mandate technology

platforms to cooperate with law enforcement agencies to improve the flow of true information. In order to get maximum benefits of digital democracy, it is mandatory to legally curb the flow of fake information and hinder indoctrination of masses against the country. For this, several countries mandate the localization of personal data and encryption services by proper legislative measures. Pakistan, too, has implemented the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act. There is a need to introduce and legislate upon more such laws to improve political participation by flow of true information.

Not only new legislation, but also educating the masses by social campaigns to promote digital democracy in far-flung areas of the country is a need of the hour. Since social media encourages

Young people to participate in politics, it needs to be provided to all and sundry. It provides greater grasp of the country's political situation. People should be taught the benefits of e-democracy and social media to enhance their political participation. In Pakistan, unfortunately, not maximum people understand such new technological gadgets. They need to be provided with knowledge about the use of such tools. Moreover, through social campaigns, they should be made aware of the tactics of misinformation campaigns. It will, ultimately, inculcate a balanced approach in them towards politics of the country.

In similar manner, there is a need to break the monopoly of tech giants to make the system more diverse, inclusive and pro-democratic. Reforms should be introduced to reduce the

Share of top earning companies and individuals to make the system more democratic. Companies should be stopped from price-fixing, restricting technologies, and using data and algorithms to manipulate the markets. Pakistan is also grappled with tech monopoly. Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) is one of such examples. Pakistan can follow in the steps of the USA which in 1902, under President Roosevelt, used the Sherman Antitrust Act as a basis for trying to break up the monopolization of technology. Therefore, it can be safely argued that by checking the monopoly of tech companies, digital democracy can be better used to enhance political participation.

In a nutshell, digital democracy enhances political participation by using social media, its challenges notwithstanding. Its evolution reflects the open-ended

open experimental interplay of political processes. By political engagement of people, governments have become more responsive in nature. It is important to carefully consider the potential drawbacks of digital democracy and social media as it can lead to hybrid warfare and polarised politics. By properly checking its challenges through proper licensing and mandatory legislation, such platforms can be used to support the progress and development of any country. Moreover, concrete and progressive legislations and educating the masses can also lead to a steep race to reap maximum benefits out of new form of democracy. Today, as technology is growing by leaps and bounds, its interplay with democracy has also magnified. Therefore, Pakistan should also take affirmative measures to ensure healthy and maximum democratic norms by the inclusive use of digital democracy.

(PRECTS #5)

Title:-

"The origin of civilization"

A permanent habitual and settled way of life gave birth to civilization. It came with home and the school. In hunting age, it was difficult for civilization to get flourished because men depended on hunting and women on tillage. However, men, to keep his sway intact, resorted to tillage. This transition took centuries and the civilization began. Civilization came through home and agriculture; and it was woman who gave these both to men. It sets aside Moxedih's false claim that woman will be the last creature to be civilized by man. Contrary to that, it is woman whose last domesticated animal is man, the last creature to be civilized by woman.

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