

English Essay

Title 'The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion and Democracy'

Outline

1. Introduction
2. The Correlation of Social Media with Public Opinion and Democracy.
3. How Social Media plays an optimistic role in shaping public opinion:
 - a- provides platform to share citizens' concerns.
 - b- increases access to information.
 - c- creates diversity in thinking patterns.
 - d- bridges communication gap between the less knowledgeable/^{informed} and more knowledgeable/^{informed}.
4. How Social Media facilitates Democracy:
 - a- enhances citizen-government interaction
 - b- increases responsiveness of government
 - c- provides an opportunity for increased transparency and accountability.

5. How Social Media proves to be detrimental in shaping public opinion:

- a- spreads misinformation. (manipulates the discourse)
- b- Emboldens hate speech.
- c- destroys the ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.

6. How Social Media threatens democracy?

- a- promotes polarization.
- b- promotes political extremism
- c- elevates & breach of privacy.

7: Social Media can foster a positive shift in public opinion, and strengthen democracy by:

- a- properly regulating the websites, applications and softwares.
- b- Increasing media literacy among public.
- c- Enacting laws for cyber bullying and disinformation campaigns.
- d- utilizing social media for

collective action and positive changes in a society.

- e Empowering citizens to identify misinformation and develop healthy online behaviour.

8. Conclusion

Think of social media as a giant megaphone. In the past, only a few people had access to it, but now, everyone does. One loud voice can now reach millions, changing opinions and sparking big changes in the society. Social media has now given access to every individual using it, on every matter of life. It's an open space for all to express and connect. It has spread its roots in every corner of the globe, ~~etc~~ constructing public opinion and giving voice to the most acceptable form of government - democracy. It is a double-edged sword, proving to be both ^{and detrimental as well} optimistic in shaping public discourse and democracy. ~~and~~ It provides platform for citizen engagement, enhanced access to information, and bridges the communication gaps between

the unlearned and a learned one, when it fosters civic engagement and responsiveness on the part of governments, which ^{depict it} ~~pave way~~ ^{entity} for its ^{as a} constructive ~~features~~. However, it threatens the public discourse and democracy by spreading misinformation, breaching privacy, ^{and} manipulating public opinion. To make it a productive tool in the society, the governments and individuals need to play their roles effectively and wisely. In a nutshell, social media holds the power to sway public opinion and influence democratic norms within a society under some limits and regulated mechanisms.

Social media is a modern day tool, which emerged as media for the sake of communication,

and was eventually given in the hands of a social animal - the human being. This creature made this tool favourable for his benefits in every walk of life. The most significant contribution of the social media is that it gave voice to individuals' thoughts. It became a platform for shaping and sharing of public opinion by a click. It has developed in such a manner that everyone can bring their views, issues, and desires to the light, regardless of their age, gender or class. The general public actively involves and engages on this platform and build their perspective on the ~~con~~cern, thus building their narrative. For example: The hashtag #Black Lives Matter was used over 48 million times

on Twitter between May 26 and June 7, 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, highlighting the movement's influence on social media (CNN, June 2020). Social media not only shapes public narrative but also shapes democracy. It also unveils the effects and consequences of the acceptable, and sometimes the pessimistic aspects of forms of governments, whether they are public-friendly or not. In this way, social media ~~becomes~~ direct ly or indirectly ^{becomes} the voice of an individual residing in any corner of the globe, as according to Abraham Lincoln:

'Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people'. In this manner, social media ~~is~~ becomes a powerful instrument to give voice to their thoughts, and the leadership type they demand

In the 21st century, opinions find their way to screen quickly and do become the word-of-mouth of every individual out there. Indeed, social media has emerged as a puppeteer due to its enormous outreach, as it gives room to every citizen out there to express, communicate and share their stories, ^{and} grievance^s ~~and~~ for his ^{one's} promotion, success and betterment. This is, to a greater extent, an optimistic picture of social media, where it is used to comfort the public whenever they ~~are~~ are in a state of conflict, chaos or indecisiveness. It provides a space to redress their grievance^s through multiple websites and applications including Meia, X (Twitter), Instagram and many others. People are heard now, consoled and

resolved with their disputes in the blink of an eye. For example the hashtag #MeToo was used by the survivors of sexual harassment to share their stories. It sparked a global movement, leading to increased awareness, policy changes, and accountability of perpetrators. This is how, social media provides a platform to public for sharing their concerns as their voices are morphed into actions and bring historical changes.

In the era of information technology - it is called so as it is actually the era of social media - the social media has made it handy to acquire and access information for public. Now any person is just a click away from the news of latest advancements in any part of the world, as he has access to the ^{every} minute

7

pr. bit of information and any happening across the world. This helps in building public narrative regarding any pursuit of life; catering the issues in the world, identifying their problems and current needs, how to behave in that scenario and much more like that. Hence, there is a bulge of information regarding every domain, happening and sector to indulge into. Examples include, in 2016 the number of UK Twitter users is estimated at 15.8 million, while the number of US Twitter users is about 67 million. Thus, the data from Twitter could give a broader picture about public opinions during EU Referendum in UK, and 2016 US Presidential Election (European Economic Review, 2021). This is how, not even people, but also govern

ments are sometimes in need of data to take important decisions based on public sentiments and opinions.

Furthermore, Social media also serves as a forum for networking and communication among individuals. It bridges the gaps between ~~the~~^{the} distanced and far-flung sources enriched with information, knowledge or reform-based ideology and those who ~~were~~ are not fully aware of their rights, roles and the influence of their voice. It promotes the building of ties to give one's vision a collective voice and thus becomes the mouthpiece of public. Public built their opinion based on the information and ~~at~~^{the} more discussioned debate in that course of time, giving rise to ~~a~~ collective action. Take Greta Thunberg, a

9
teenager whose lone school strike against climate inaction sparked a global movement as Fridays for Future — which afterwards turned the Global community towards this debate of COPs (COP 26) and climate concerned (BBC, 9 May 2024). Through such different movements by different activists urged the whole world to think about the concerns they were blind and deaf to. In this manner, social media brings diversity in the viewpoints of public by bridging the communication gaps and broadening the linkages ^{among individuals} in every corner of the globe.

The people-driven form of government is also facilitated by social media, as it enhances the interaction between the citizens and ^{the} government. Through In this way, the government frames their ^{its}

policies according to the needs of the public, does law-making, catering to its own current challenges. This gives a boom to the economies catering the needs of public, facilitating them at first hand, ~~so~~ creating opportunities for them. It promotes the countries' socio-economic and political conditions, and eventually they prosper. Social media highlights and makes the people aware about such examples from the world, their circumstances, history and fosters prosperity and stability. It is ultimately a two-way relationship, where individuals support their governments, enables mass participation and provide instant feedbacks ^{where}. On the other hand, governments invest and work for the betterment of citizens, keeping aside their own personal interests. Barack Obama's historic win as the first African-

American President of USA, got immense ^{Public} people feedback from his online voters through Facebook and Twitter, as young voters rely more on social media. He also ran his Presidential Campaign (2008) on media platforms to instigate the young voters.

(Central European University, 2022)

In this way, the citizens choose their representatives collectively to meet the needs of public. And social media serves as a valuable asset.

§ Digital media promotes democracy by increasing responsiveness on the shoulders of the government. The government is more public-centered rather than self-centered, catering their interests, needs and challenges ~~in~~ ^{in a} tactful manner. It holds strong control

on the managerial, monitorial and facilitative roles in a country. Social media plays the role of a bridge connecting public concerns with ^{that of} the governments agenda, and ^{the} governments become more concerned and linked with the task of making it more transparent and community oriented. Media provides strengthens the ties, and governments work tirelessly for promoting public good. Denmark's example in this regard is well suited, as it is one of the world's finest democracies. Denmark effectively uses ~~social~~ social media to enhance government transparency, citizen engagement, and responsiveness. The Danish government ensures real-time communication, share feedback and news regarding country.

13
progress and address the queries of public (IPDN Journal, 2023).

This is how, media backs democracies by making governments more responsible and public-oriented.

In a democratic setup, the media plays a significant role in holding the leadership accountable for their actions and words. This technological era brings every aspect of one's life to the light, especially the politicians, who are the guardians of state, and gives opportunity to the public to have a complete outlook of the socio-economic conditions of the country, thus commenting on governments' roles and their effectivity. The transparency ultimately gains trust of public on politicians and institutions, which paves way for prosperity.

and stability of the countries. Every year Transparency International issues its annual report and Scandinavian countries, including Finland and Sweden leads the ladder by trusting the free and fair election system and voting rights provide to them. The state institutions prove to be the beacons of trust...

(Dawn, 2022). In such circumstances transparency and accountability, which are the core pillars of any democracy are strengthened by the digital display of every report and statistics on the media platforms to keep it on the record. ~~and in public's~~

Despite all its positive impacts, media also plays an infamous role in this century. With the development of internet technology and different social

media platforms, the misinformation once spread by the word-of-mouth is now rapidly spread through social media platforms with a wide range of influence and impact. A large amount of false information and spread of rumors have become part of the society, narrated even by the educated and civilized class of people. It distorts their psychological health and misinterprets their role in society. It ultimately contributes in sowing discord among the societies, individuals and maligning the state's image in the eyes of international community. An example of this information during COVID-19 pandemic, regarding its evolution, surge, symptoms and death toll was all taking rounds on social media, out of which

most of it was regarded 'entirely inaccurate or completely made-up claims' by American Research labs.

This is how social media has become a malignant tool that ~~becomes~~ spreads the fake and fabricated information to a greater extent, which later on becomes the public narrative, thus distorts the national image and hampers prosperity.

In addition to misinformation, social media also contributes in emboldening the hate-speech. The scattered tweets and facebook posts coalesce to bring mass protests that result in toppling regimes and re-writing political manifestos such as ~~*~~ # Arab Spring. Such social movements galvanize supporters across geographical and ideological divides and push for long overdue societal shifts.

This ability to potentiate collective action represents the true muscle of social media's influence that transforms isolated opinions into resounding voices of change.

Arab Spring started from Tunisia, which was the result of extreme fury of ~~the~~ Tunisian public on their government, causing political upheaval and regime change in many Mediterranean countries, including Egypt, Libya, Morocco and others. (European Institute of Mediterranean (IAEMed), 2013). This is how, social media ~~builds~~ ~~but~~ shapes public opinion aggressively, and ^{can} result in mass disturbances and turbulence.

Social media erodes the capacity to discern between right and wrong, thus undermining informed decision-making within the society. Multiple social media trends and tweets regarding any happening

make public double-minded regarding the authenticity of the news, or sometimes makes them a blind follower and advocate of such chromatic events, thus deterring their abilities to distinguish between right and wrong. The media holds influential character, but it brutally impacts the decisive capabilities among the public to support or restrain any incident. They just adopt a single motto and bring chaos and disruption in the society.

#Aurat March in Pakistan is one such example. The agenda is to support the less dominant gender, but the ill-usage of social media and the slogan was got so strong that it leads to the disruption of public discourse through biased judgement

Dawn,
2023

... "In this way, people driven by emotions, when see any new debate, jump into the pool with

out sound understanding, thus remain ~~to~~ remain lost between actuality and fantasy. Therefore, social media holds immense political to shape public opinions hazardedly by deterring the ability of conformism and decision-making.

In addition to playing a devastating role in public opinion, democracy also lags behind in this century due to the impacts of social media as it promotes polarization. Media platforms give rise to increased risk of online radicalization due to different political doctrines and increased polarization for or one side or group. This potentiates violence and threatening of individual and societal well being. In this way, the state-survivors ~~and~~ become rebels in front of the leaderships and hinders the development and

sustainability. For example: Many Analysts regarded Donald Trump's Election Campaign of 2020 as a social media war. #USElection2020 and #RealDonaldTrump got 1.2 million retweets at the time of US elections and he was crowned as the 45th President of United States of America. (Ballot Pedia 2020). This is how, via increased popularity, democracies just become a ~~man-m~~ one man show, sidelining the competitors and falling of regimes built on social media fronts.

Furthermore, digital media creates political extremisms, threatening the democracies in the nations holding it. When the ~~mismatched~~ ^{misleading} information and the actual information ~~are~~ ^{are} jumbled, it gives rise to aggression and antagonism. It leads to propaganda formation against one particular group, thus agita-

ting the masses. Media, now considered the fourth pillar of democracy, when shows biasness or distorted speech ^{itself} ~~attracts~~ invites riots and anarchy. Political extremism is one of the worst ^{activities} ~~forms~~ that bring push the democracies to the brink of disaster and threatens their ~~ext~~ existence. Extremist groups like ISIS use social media for propaganda. According to ^{India New Bank} 2/10/16 ISIS Hyderabad module case, the ISIS used Facebook to spread propaganda including Indian youth. Through ^{such} these ^{promoting} nexus, the democracies are at chaos as Winston Churchill famously said, Democracy is the worst political system in the world, except for all others. What make it the worst are ~~ex~~ definitely the factors.

Social media undermines democratic principles by breaching the privacy of users: thus

damaging the roots of democracy. The sharing of data and information about peoples' personal lives has proved to be the biggest disadvantage of social media. It is not ~~so~~ with the public but ~~with~~ leaders ~~and~~, experts and institutions have ^{also} fallen prey to this ^{vicious} trap of social media. This digital age has exposed the ^{each} and every aspect of the lives of people, eroding trust on institutions and politicians.

For example, the political rivals in Pakistan try to hack the data and expose the ~~pr~~ data of other party's personals, ⁱⁿ ^{which} include their audio or video leaks. Such cases are quite common for general public and officials whose ^{user's} data is used to threaten the other and this hinders the democratic activities and democracy to flourish.

Digital Media can foster a positive shift in public opinion and strengthen democracy when it is regulated properly. The When proper checks are posed on websites, applications and softwares, it promotes social good too. A balance of ^{positive} content and hateful content within the limits is crucial. The programming of softwares and applications can be controlled ^{by authorities} to this very level, that it does not hamper the democratic process by shaping such a narrative of ~~p~~ which is contemptuous, illegally uploaded and now up graded, including abusive material, hate speech, incitement to violence and so on. This could promote a healthy and democratic environments for national growth. Social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter,

now X, if regulated and managed could become worthy revolutions for the pioneers of this generation (Dr Marian-Alexandru Rizoiu - University of Sydney - Aug 23). This is how, nations can thrive if digital space is regulated.

Another fundamental key of promoting a united and healthy, democratic public opinion is educating the people to this much extent that they can differentiate what to follow and what not to. This sense of media literacy would make them sensitive to prejudice and learn to appreciate diversity, in terms of choosing their representatives. Ultimately, they could eagerly promote wisdom and ~~could~~ handle the leadership crisis. They ^{Public} can promote models of e-governance which helps them enhance the overall image of ~~power~~

their societies/countries. Finland is one such country, which has integrated media literacy into its education system, focussing on critical thinking and digital literacy from a very young age. which is why, it is among ^{a few of} the happiest countries in the world.

Increasing media literacy is a significant measure in strengthening ^{discourse and} public democracy.

A proper law-and-order mechanism ~~st~~ to counter cyber bullying and disinformation campaigns ~~is~~ aids in promoting public good and good governance.

An accountability ~~mechanism~~ mechanism should be enacted on its use for public safety, ~~and~~ deterring blasphemy and criminal activities. Proper checks for social media age limit for children, content management and controlled duration to certain

applications is imperative in this regard. This would ultimately lessen the cyber crimes and disinformation campaigns. The Digital Services Act is a groundbreaking law in EU digital ~~se~~ operations forcing them to be legally accountable for everything from fake news to manipulation... (The Guardian, Aug 23) This is how, such laws can definitely ensure public safety, trust on leaders and institutions.

Promoting positive changes in society through social media movements ~~and~~ propogates collective action and healthy changes in the society. Democracy flourishes and prospers where ~~ind~~ public and governments join hands for public benefit. This induces positive change in society and it ~~is~~ through social

media. Digital platforms aggravate individuals to take part in campaigns for common interest serving public interest and it supports the nations on every scale. A Youth Social-Political Movement in Nigeria was propagated by social media to encourage the preservation of our ecosystem through planting trees. It mobilized people from all over the state for a walk through social media platforms.

(Methew Tegha - ConnexUs - 2022)

Through social media, such positive activities can be strengthened for public and social good.

Alongwith other practices for bringing a ^{positive} shift in the public narrative and people-government coordination is the ability to identify misinformation by empowering citizens.

A healthy online behaviour with a distinction between what is wrong and what is right is necessary for boosting a democratic environment in a nation. Via multiple checks and regulated content insurance, the entangled misinformation can be rooted up from society, citizens being apt and able enough to distinguish between the fabricated and actual information can better boost the democracy. The Scandinavian countries are rich in their social values as they are more civilized in the usage of media platforms to tackle their problems. This is how, empowering citizens and developing a strong sense of online information can pave way for success and dignity of the nations.

In a nutshell, social media holds the power to influence.

public opinion and strengthen democracy in a society if pop properly used and regulated.

It plays both beneficial and drastic roles in shaping the public opinion and democracy, but under controlled conditions.

It can, on one hand, address the public concerns, ^{provides} gives room for gaining information and bridges gap between the sectors. It facilitates democracy by enhancing public-government interaction, governments responsibilities and opportunity for accountability via various platforms and tools.

On the other hand, it plays a drastic role by spreading misinformation, hate speech and public dissatisfaction and confusion. It also threatens democracy by promoting polarization, political extremism and breach of privacy.

It can be managed by proper

law and order, control and increasing media literacy. Therefore, social media can promote public good when if regulated and monitored effectively.