

Growing Power of Social Media: Prospects and Challenges

OUTLINE

1. Introduction

- a- Attention Grabber
- b- General statement
- c- Thesis statement:

The contemporary era has witnessed the growing power of social media. It has both positive and negative roles. However, there is need to regulate it responsibly.

2. Defining Social media and its different platforms

3. Prospects of Growing Power of Social Media

- a- Enhancing the role of public in the political process: boon for democracy
- b- Influencing foreign policy of a country
- c- Boosting national economy
- d- Increasing accountability
- e- Improving delivery-based governance

f- Promoting online learning and digital education

g- Preserving culture of a society

h- Encouraging gender equality

i- Increasing voice for climate security

4. Challenges of Growing Power of Social Media

a- Proving to be a tool of hybrid war

b- Posing threat to democracy

c- Increasing health concerns

d- Rising threat of misinformation and disinformation

e- Increasing role of separatist movements against state

f- Posing threat to culture

5. Suggested measures to tame social media for better use

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Date: _____

6- Conclusion

Essay

Day: _____

Date: _____

The world has witnessed great changes in the past few decades. In the past times, the people used to travel hundreds of miles to convey one message and to meet near and dear ones. But today is the culmination of hundreds of years of technological progress. The contemporary era has witnessed the growing power of social media. It has both positive and negative role to play. However, there is dire need to regulate it responsibly. The growing power of social media has become an important part of social, political, economic and cultural life; people are engaged in political participation, making it boon for democracy. Foreign policy is influenced with the increasing role of public. Moreover, Boosting national economy and increasing accountability at individual, political, judicial and institutional level are some of the appreciated prospects of social media. Adding more prospects, it is of high importance to discuss the improving governance, promoting online learning, preserving culture and increasing voice for climate security. However, despite these prospects, there are certain challenges that are rising due to irresponsible and uncontrolled use

of social media; it has become an important tool of hybrid war and misinformation and disinformation. Among other challenges, increasing health issues, posing threat to democracy, increasing role of separatist forces against state and posing existential threat to culture cannot be missed. Therefore, some meticulous policy measures at national, global, organizational and institutional level can help cope up with the challenges posed by the growing power of social media.

Before discussing the prospects and challenges of social media in detail, it is necessary to understand meaning of social media. Simply defined, social media is a term used to define the communication among people and groups where they share ideas, images, videos, audio, calls and some documents through online applications. There are few social media platforms: Facebook, WhatsApp, Youtube, Zoom, Tik Tok, Instagram and etc.

After an overview of meaning and several platforms of social media, it is necessary to discuss here the prospects of growing power of social media.

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Date: _____

Among other prospects, social media is an important platform for political participation by people. In recent years, people are increasingly participating in the political process of country. The protest and trends on X platform against the controversial results of 2024 elections testifies the increasing role of public in politics. Moreover, referendum of Indian people against Modi's policies on social media completely changed the results of Indian Elections. Dhruv Rathi - Indian Youtuber's campaign on social media against BJP caused great damage to the ruling party. In this way, people are engaging in political process through social media.

Similarly, influencing of foreign policy of a country is another prospects of growing power of social media. The common people are actively engaging in national, regional and global affairs through social media platforms. Boycott of Israeli and French products: Pepsi, Nestle, KFC and other products is a case in point in this regard. Additionally, Pak-India, Pak-US and Pak-China foreign policy and relationships are formulated on the basis of public opinion. It is public sentiment to formulate friendly

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Date: _____

relations with China. Public's outrage against United States' alleged involvement in regime change in Pakistan through social media has influenced the ties between the two. Thus, there is great influence of social media in formulation of foreign policy.

Going further, social media is boosting national economy. After the breakout of COVID-19; the shift of digital economy has been witnessed. People ~~or~~ have started E-commerce, freelancing, Amazon, Krypto currency. Moreover, Tik Tok live earning, Youtube and Facebook monetization are some of the online earning platforms. This shift to digital earning results in boosting national economy.

In addition to the prospects of social media, social media has increased the accountability. Public is actively participating in the social media trends to make politicians, army officials, judicial fraternity, religious leaders and institutions. The prime minister of United Kingdom Boris Johnson had to step down because of public criticism over violation of COVID-19 SOPs. The recent trends in Pakistan against Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) allocation of reserve seats to the treasury benches

compelled Supreme Court of Pakistan to allocate those seats on grounds of fairness and justice. That is why now social media helps ensure accountability.

Furthermore, increasing delivery-based governance is another positive aspect of growing power of social media. Punjab government's pre-preparedness for Monsoon season is the result of criticism by public on online platforms. Free Wifi in Lahore, Online Air Ambulance and Federal's provision of free electricity for those using consuming less than 100 units are evident here. There are multiple development projects like Green Line, Metro bus, BRT Peshawar and People's Bus Service that started due to public demand through social media. In this way, social media ^{helps} improve governance.

More significantly, social media promotes online learning and digital education. The world has shifted its focus from traditional learning to online learning. Youtube, Facebook and Zoom are the leading platforms that provide online classes, material and access to online library. Universities are offering online classes to students. Online evaluation of topics has become possible due to sources of social media

platforms. Moreover, students of competitive examination like CSS and PMS take online classes and get their assignments checked by teachers through WhatsApp, Zoom and E-mail. Thus, precisely saying, social media is an effective tool of online learning.

Further discussing, preserving culture of a society is one of the positive aspects of growing power of social media. Rise of globalization has brought different cultures at center of attention. Different cultures are promoted through social media platforms. Sindhi Culture Day, Punjab Culture Day, Pashtun and Baloch Culture Day are celebrated and displayed through Facebook, Youtube and TikTok. Moreover, Islamic culture is preserved and promoted to the every corner of the world through social media. Succinctly, social media preserves culture of society.

In the same way, social media is a platform that encourages and promotes gender equality. Gender-related issues have been highlighted due to the growing power of social media. There are some evidences here: Nour Muqadam case handling and persecution of her murder, arrest of culprits of

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Date: _____

Zainab of Kasoor and Sialkot Motorway case. Moreover, the feminist movements are active on social media for the equal rights to women. Now, it is common to watch debates^{and} programmes on T.V channels and social media for gender equality. Women segment of society have been able to ~~en~~ get some rights due to the growing power of social media.

In the last, increasing voice for climate security can be heard just because of social media. The trends on X and Facebook for securing environment from hazards of climate change has compelled states to take measures to deal with the issue. Climate activists like Greta Thunberg, Sheery Rehman and Sadh Guru have become the voice of the voiceless people against environmental degradation. Additionally, Pakistan's Billion Tree Tsunami, E-Vehicles, Saudi Arabia's "2030 Vision" and COP₂₈ meetings are evidences that social media has increased voice of climate security.

Although there are countless numbers of prospects of the growing power of social media, but there are some problems in this regard.

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Date: _____

Going into problems of social media, it is a tool of hybrid war. The rise of uncontrolled power of social media has brought new dynamics to war. Social media disseminate biased and manipulated information.

EU Disinfo Lab is example here where 700 accounts were found to be used by India against Pakistan. More shockingly, it is an effective tool of cyber attacks. PEGASUS is an Israeli spyware which was used to hack 5000 accounts of politicians, influencers, leaders, and celebrities including Imran Khan. In this way, hybrid war has become more lethal due to growing power of social media.

Shockingly enough, social media is posing an existential threat to democracy. Anti-democratic forces are using it as a tool to harm democracy. Demagogue and populist leaders have done great damage to democracy by promoting their fascist and authoritarian ideology through social media. Capital Hill attacks are evident here. Modi's hindutva policies have proved to be harmful for Muslims and non-Hindus. Freedom of expression and religious freedom and social rights are confiscated and harassed through social media. This makes it threat to democratic values.

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Date: _____

Adding more challenges, social media has shockingly increased the health concerns. People have become mentally and physically sick due to social media addiction. Depression and stress among people is an alarming aftermath of uncontrolled and overuse of social media. The study in Harvard University reveals that after breakout of COVID-19, the health issues among human have increased alarmingly. Furthermore, the US President said, "The rampant misinformation related to COVID vaccine on social media is killing people."

Quite alarmingly, social media is spreading misinformation and disinformation. It is a tool to spread fake news and propaganda to put harm to others' reputation. The era of COVID-19 witnessed the rampant misinformation through Facebook, Whatsapp and Youtube. It was made viral that COVID-19 vaccines will kill people within two years. On a global level, misinformation and disinformation are used to sabotage rivals. EU Disinfo Lab^{was} operated by India to spread disinformation against Pakistan. That is why, social media is an effective tool of misinformation and disinformation.

In addition to it, the role of separatists movements have increased with the growing power of social media. Pakistani state is facing the serious threat of separatists forces that are using social media to tarnish and sabotage the national security.

Baloch Liberation Army, Baloch Liberation Front and Pashtun Tahafuz Movement are actively spreading propaganda against state institutions. RAW's nexus with these separatists are on the mission to dismember Balochistan and tribal areas of KPK. Free Balochistan and Free Karachi slogans on social media are evident in this regard.

Discussing last challenge, social media is posing threat to culture. It is inspiring people of different culture to do away with their own culture and adopt other. Westernization of eastern culture is result of movies of Hollywood, celebrities lifestyle, social media influencers and so on. People of eastern culture follow western dress, lifestyle, customs and traditions. Moreover, ^{illicit} relationship between girl and boy is an inspired style of living of western culture.

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After discussing prospects and challenges of the growing power of social media, it is necessary here to give certain suggestion to tame social media for better use.

Going into recipe to improve use of social media, it is indispensable to adopt holistic approach at individual, national, global and organizational level. There is need of check on the content shown on different platforms. Pakistan is about to adopt "Fire Wall" mechanism to analyze content of social media. Moreover, over use and social media addiction must be overcome for good health. The sole cyber agencies to deal with hybrid war, misinformation and disinformation can be prudent here. At global and organizational level, the tech giants and tech companies must be held accountable and responsible for use of social media.

In conclusion, social media has both prospects and challenges. It has brought great gifts at one hand and ^{has}stabbed in the back with the other. Among its gifts, it has revolutionized the world

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by improving social, political, economic and cultural aspects of human life. From climate security to foreign policy influences and from gender-related issues to the economic growth, it has greatly brought about countless benefits for the world. But, as every prospect has some challenges, social media has also posed threat to health of men, democracy, state institutions, cultures, and tool of a hybrid war. Therefore, there is dire need to cope with these challenges posed by the growing power of social media.