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
5. 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: (manipulates the discourse).

a- spreads misinformation.

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 compaigns.

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, but 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 X optimistic in shaping public discourse and democracy. and It p Social media provides platform for citizen engagement, enhanced access to information, and bridges the communication gap between

the unlearned and a learned one.
whilt fosters citic engagement
and responsiveness on the part
of governments, which pave way depicts its
for its constructive features entity.
          as a
However, it threatens the public
discourse and democracy by
spreading misinformating, brea
ching privacy, manipulating
                  and
public opinion. To make it a
productive tool in the society,
the governments and indiviuals
& need to play their roles effective
ly 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 indivials' thoughts. It p 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 corn concern, 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 movements influence on social media (CNN, June 2020). Social media not only shapes public narrative but also shapes democracy. It also unveils the effects and conseques 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 indiviual 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 indiviual out there. Indeed, social media has emerged as a puppeteer due to it's enormous outreach, as it gives room to every citizen out there to express, communicate and share their stories, and grievancess and for ones his 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 their are are in a state of conflict, chaos or indecisive ness. It provides a space to redress their grivances through multiple websites and applications includ-ing Meta, 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 hastag #Metoo was used by the survivors of sexual harrassment 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 one he has access to the engry minute

pi. bit of information and any happening across the world. This helps in building public narrative regarding any persuit of life; catering the issues in the world, identifying their problems and current needs, how to behave in that scenerio 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 gave a broder 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 indiviuals. It bridges the gaps between the ~~the~~ distanced and far-flung sources enriched with infor mation, knowledge or reform-based ideology and those who ~~ament~~ are not fully aware of their rights, roles and the influence of their ~~so~~ 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 ~~ali~~ the more discussioned debate in that course of time, giving rise to ~~a~~ collective action. Take Greta Thunberg, a

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. ~~It~~ 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 th its own current challenges. This gives a boom to the economies catering. the needs of public, facilitating them at first hand, to creating opportunities for them. It promotes the countries socialo-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 relation ship, where indiviuals supports their governments, enables mass participation and provide instant feedbacks, On where the other hand, governments invest and work for the betterment of citizens, keeping aside their own personal interests. Barak Obama's historic win as the first African-

American President of USA, got immense people Public feedback from his online voters through Facebook and Twitter, as young voters rely more oa 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 valucable 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 a tactfully 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 provide 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 feeb ack and news regarding country

progress and address the queries of public (if 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 for in holding the leaderships accountable for their actions and words. It 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 an 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 ev year Transparency
International issues its annual
report and Scandinavian count
ries, 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 e

　　　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 so 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 becousmes the 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 ⚡ # ArabSpring. Such social movements galavanize 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.

\# Arabspring started from Tunisia, which was the result of extreme fury of ~~a~~ 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 (IAMEMed), 2013). This is how, Social media ~~builts pub~~ shapes public opinion agressively 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

maker public double-minded regarding the authenticity of the news, or sometimes makes them a blind follower and advocate of such chrimatic events, thus deteiing their abilities to distinguish between rights and wrongs. The media holds influential character, but ø brutally impacts the decisive capabilities among the public to support of or restrain of any incident. They just adopt a single motto and ob 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 war got so strong that it leads to the disruption of public discourse through baised judgement

Dawn,) ... "In this way, people driven
2023) by emotions, when see any new debate, jump into the pool with

out sound understanding, thus ~~remain info~~ remain lost between actuality and fantasy. Therefore, social media holds immense politicial to shape public opinions hazardosly 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 politicial doctrines and increased polarization for ~~x~~ one side or group. This potentiates violence and threatening of indiviual and societal well being. In this way, the state- ~~survipvors 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 ~~oo~~ and falling of regimes built on social media fronts.

Furthermore, digital media creates political extremism, threatening the democracies in the nations holding it. When the ~~mismatched~~ misleading information and the actual information ~~are~~ are jum~~p~~bled, it gives rise to agression and antagonism. It leads to propaganda formation against one particular group, thus agita-

ting the masses. Media, now consid ered the fourth pillar of democracy, when shows baisness or distorted speech, ~~attracts~~ itself invites riots and anarchy. Political extremism is one of the worst ~~forms~~ activities that ~~bring~~ push the democracies to the brink of disaster and threatens their ~~ex~~ existence. Extremist groups like ISIS use social media for propaganda. According to India New Bank 2016 ISIS-Hydrabad module case, the ISIS used Facebook to spread propaganda including Indian youth. Through ~~these~~ such nexus, promoting extremism 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 of the privacy of users; thus

damaging the roots of democracy.
The sharing of data and infor
mation about peoples' personal
lives has t proved to be
the biggest disadvantage of
social media. It is not so
with the public but with
leaders and experts and insti
tutions 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 which indeude their audio or
video leaks. Such cases are quite
common for general public and
officials where one's usly data is
used to threat 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 doesnot hamper the democratic process by shaping such a narrative off p which is contemptuous, illegaly 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-Aindei Rizoiu-University of Syndney-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 sen-sitive to preojudice and learn to appreciate diversity, in terms of choosing their representatives. Ultimately, they could eagerly promote wisdom and ~~could~~ handle the leadership cricis. 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 public discourse and democracy.

A proper law-and-order mechanism to counter cyber bullying and disinformation campaigns 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 compaigns. 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 find public and governments join hands for public benefit. This induces positive change in society and it ... through social

media. Digital platforms agravate individuals to take part in compaigns for common interest serving public interest and it supports the nations on every scale. A Yoth Social-Political Movement in Nigeria was propogated 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 cocial 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 misin formation by empowering citizens.

A healthy online behaviour with a distinction between what is wrong and what is right is necessary for boosting fla democratic environment in a nation. Via multiple checks and regulated content ensurance, 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, adress the public concerns, ~~gives~~ provides room for gaining information and bridges gap between the sectors. It facilitates democracy by enhancing public ~~an~~ 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 increas
ing media literacy. Therefore,
social media can promote
public good when if regulated
and monitored effectively.