

Full Length Mock

English Essay

Digital Platforms: New Battlegrounds For Free Speech

Outline

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I. Introduction

Digital Platforms have opened the debate on the credibility of free speech in political, social, economic, legal and technological areas of life. However, some underdeveloped countries face ^{various} challenges in legitimization of digital platforms. Therefore, certain measures are needed.

II. Understanding of digital platforms and their evolution from primary public discourse to unregulated content delivery

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Case in point: Echo chambers spreading
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Essay

The narrative warfare that is also termed as **hybrid warfare** was also one of the key war tactics adopted by India in recent escalation of May, 2025 between India and Pakistan. The India's strategy to present Pakistan as terrorism supported country in front of international media, forecasts how the world has entered into digital warfare. On the same ground, digital platforms have served as the battlegrounds for free speech due to the degree of harm it inflicts in form of misinformation and cybercrimes. The increased number of fake news and misinformation, political polarization, weak democratic setup and narrative warfare question the weak legitimacy of digital platforms. Social media ^{not only} promotes populist politics by undermining moderate voices but also contributes in youth radicalization across the globe. Freedom of speech has ^{raised the} ^{regarding} questioned the state regulations regarding cyber bullying, gender justice, public trust in state institutions, digital distrust and Islamic teachings. Not only this, non-regulated speech on social media has resulted into regulation dilemma for government. Moreover, weak enforcement of cyber laws and digital legal illiteracy has erode the credibility of digital platforms. The legitimization of content delivery, enforcement of cyber laws and encouragement of public trust in state institutions are suggested for positive outcomes in underdeveloped countries. Hence, digital platforms has opened the debate on the credibility of freedom of speech in multiple areas of life; therefore, certain suggested measures are needed.

The freedom of expression or free speech is the basic fundamental right of an individual of a society. He or she can share their ideas or narratives freely. In the history, people use the print media i.e., newspaper, magazines and journals to share their perspectives to the world. However, in late 21st century, the introduction of social media and digital platforms has opened the new discourse for public engagement. Not only youth but also elderly people around the globe are seen connected to one another through multiple digital platforms i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc. ^{along his wife} The news of abduction of Venezuelan President ^{by} US (United States) military forces on 3 January, 2025 was opened to the world after some time due to the presence of digital platforms. Hence, digital platforms serve as primary source of public discourse.

The importance of digital platforms in connecting the world cannot be denied. As a primary source of public discourse, digital platforms, contributes in globalization. However, certain political, economic, social, legal and technological factors have contributed in reshaping the status of freedom of speech in digital platforms.

To start with, a persistent increase has observed in digital platforms for

spreading misinformation and fake news. The world is grappling with the concern related to authenticity of any event that is broadcasted by digital platforms. The users of digital apps i.e, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter utilize these apps to spread misinformation for getting some likes. The authenticity of any event or news broadcasted through digital platforms are highly questioned by the observers. It is evident by the RAND Corporation's concept of "Truth Decay" that explains how false political narratives spread faster than verified facts online. Hence, fake news are spread faster by digital platforms that deteriorate the status of freedom of speech for online users.

In addition to it, political polarization has deepened as a result of similar ideas that stream on digital platforms. The major political parties and their volunteers utilize the digital platforms to share their political narratives. The existence of such echochambers that reflects similar ideas result in the political polarisation in the state. It is evident by saying of Cass Sustain that explains how the presence of echochambers provides similar ideas that ultimately results in political intolerance. Therefore, digital platforms shapes public perspective related to politics so result in

political intolerance.

Furthermore, the basic democratic framework requires consensus based arguments that are shifted by the introduction of digital platforms. The democracy demands reasoning followed by collective will; however, the emergence of digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook etc has opened the doors of conflict politics. The hashtag politics that is often seen on the Twitter(X) is the evidence of weak rational democratic debate. Daily political trends in Iran show that activism driven by slogan rather than long term policy discussions. Hence, the unchecked freedom of speech is questioned as it has weakened democratic debate in politics.

The weakening of rational democratic debate has paved the way for populist politics. The digital platforms i.e, Instagram and Twitter is mainly used for the shaping of political beliefs of public. The emotional messaging of populist leaders have contributed to influence the masses at a larger scale. It facilitates populist politics by bypassing institutions. It is evident from the statement of Fareed Zakaria, "Populist leaders use emotional digital messaging to directly influence masses." Hence,

digital platforms are serving as battleground for free speech in terms of thriving populist politics.

Not only populist politics has thrived due to freedom of speech in digital platforms, but also youth radicalization has surfaced due to unchecked viral content streaming on digital platforms. The youth bulge is using online platforms. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reports that about 60-70% of online users are young individuals between 13-25 age group. Similarly, multiple political parties use the youth for their political narratives. The mass mobilization of youth in the protests ^{of ousting Sheikh Hasena in Bangladesh} and online campaigns exemplify the youth radicalization by online platforms. Hence, viral contents and political agendas of major political parties contributes in youth radicalization by digital platforms.

In addition to it, narrative warfare by the hostile countries has fueled by the digital platforms. Despite of conventional warfare strategies, the hybrid warfare or fifth generational warfare has surfaced as a major threat to the sovereignty of any state. Hostile states use narrative game to tarnish the soft image of any state at international level. Digital platforms that provide free space opportunities has resulted into the

escalation of hybrid warfare. Arab Spring 2011 when the antistate narratives are spread by online platforms has questioned the access of freedom of speech on digital platforms. Hence, digital platforms spark narrative warfare if remain unchecked.

Cyberbullying has discouraged the voices for freedom of speech, enjoyed by the online users. The uncontrolled access of information to the users of digital platforms has resulted into spike of cyber bullying cases. The online hackers can hack the pictures and personal information of the user which can be exploited for economic purposes by hackers. The ratio of cyberbullying has drastically increased in underdeveloped countries. My neighbor's daughter faced the cyberbullying when a mysterious login alert was popped up on her instagram account. Her pictures was used for threatening purposes and the hacker demanded 1 million rupees for the account recovery. Hence, non-regulation of digital platforms has promoted the cases of cyberbullying across the globe.

In addition to it, the gender disparities have deepened by the uncontrolled use of digital platforms. In most of underdeveloped countries, girls are not

allowed to use digital platforms i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc. The concept of unregulated utilization of digital information has deepened the digital divide. The gender disparities are underscored by the low engagement of women of rural areas or through digital platforms. UN (United Nations) based Women reports highlights that online spaces have become major sites of gender based violence. Hence, gender exploitation is amplified by unregulated digital platforms.

Furthermore, false narratives that are broadcasted on digital platforms without any regulation has eroded the public trust in state institutions. The ~~sent~~ sensational content that go viral on social media shapes the public narrative. The false information by hatermongers or any opposition parties shackles the trust of masses in public institutions. The Edelman Trust Barometer shows declining public trust due to viral anti-institutional narratives. Hence, the unchecked viral posts on digital platforms shackles the public trust in state's institutions.

Not only this, the AI ~~based~~^{incorporation in} technology has fueled the digital distrust among the digital platform's users. The meta and AI (Artificial Intelligence) have capabilities to mould the narratives of elderly people in particular, and of youth, in general. With the advancement in machine learning, AI has become able to modify the pictures and videos according to given prompt. The public trust in digital platforms has eroded because of non-regulation of streaming information. The dancing video of a two year baby on Instagram had surprised my mother and she was of the opinion that world is heading towards Day of Judgement. So, digital platforms has eroded the trust of masses through fake scenerios.

The uncontrolled access to the personal information of users has been exploited by AI algorithms for economic purposes. The meta and AI which is in our digital or smart gadgets can sense the priorities of digital users. The AI algorithms often stream the products on digital apps that are according to the demand of Generation Z (Gen Z). It is evident by the analysis of International

Journal of Social Sciences that brands target Gen-Z via social platforms. Hence, unregulated access of information of digital users to digital platforms has questioned the credibility of digital platforms' freedom of expression.

Last but not the least, the freedom of expression in digital platforms contradicts with Islamic fundamental teachings. Islam is the general code of conduct that provides guidance to its believers in every field of life. Islam abstains Muslims from spreading any information without confirmation. Islam as the religion provides knowledge to its believers in form of Quran and Sunnah. Allah Almighty says in Surah Al-Hujrat (Ayat No:06), "Do not spread false information and be among the believers." Hence, the concept of freedom of speech in digital platforms contradicts with Islamic teachings.

Although the digital platforms have served as the battleground for free speech in political, social, economic and legal areas of life, major challenges are faced by some underdeveloped countries in legitimizing the digital platforms. These challenges are elaborated in the next paragraphs.

To start with, some underdeveloped countries face the battle between Freedom of Expression Vs Regulation Dilemma. The freedom of expression cannot go hand in hand with the normal regulation of state institutions. For ensuring the legalisation of information that is spread on digital platforms, compromise has to be ensured on freedom of speech that is enjoyed by all digital platforms users. John Stuart Mill in "On Liberty" argues that restricting speech harms democratic and social progress, a concern central to digital regulation debates. Hence, freedom of expression vs regulation dilemma is escalated by legal regulation of digital platforms in some underdeveloped countries.

In addition to it, weak legal accountability for cybercrimes has surfaced as one of the major challenges for regulation of digital platforms in some underdeveloped countries. The transnational nature of social media and digital platforms complicates legal accountability for cybercrimes. The UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) highlights jurisdictional challenges in prosecuting cross-border cyber offenses. Hence, jurisdictional challenge has questioned the legitimacy of digital platforms.

The lack of digital legal literacy in some underdeveloped countries has put set back to legitimise the digital platforms. The digital era has started back in early 2010; therefore, massive population of elderly people are unaware of the policy rights of digital platforms. The lack of digital legal literacy weakens the rule of law in online spaces. Legal scholars argue that citizens unaware of cyber laws cannot effectively seek justice or comply with regulations. Hence, legal awareness is needed to legitimize the content delivery of online platforms.

As major political, social and legal challenges are faced by the people of some underdeveloped countries in legitimising the content delivery of online or digital platforms, certain suggested measures are needed to counter its impacts.

To start with, prioritizing the public trust building measures in state institutions can help the political leaders or state sovereigns to legalise digital platforms. The public trust in state's institutions embody integrity and good will. With the consent of public, the effective regulation of social media platforms can

be ensured. The legalisation of social media platforms can be adopted, as done by the government of south Korea. Hence, public trust is required for the effective regulation of social media and digital platforms in some underdeveloped countries.

Moreover, the enforcement of cyber laws by law enforcers is needed to bridge the gap of legitimization of digital platforms in underdeveloped countries. The laws relating to cyber crimes are significant for the effective control of misinformation spread by online platforms. The punishment by cyber law enforcers creates deterrence among the hatemongers and hackers. This will help to safeguard the personal information of digital users on digital platforms. FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) in Pakistan has formulated to decline the cyber attacks by the online scammers. Hence, enforcement of cyber laws can help to control the content delivery of digital platforms.

To conclude ~~in~~, digital platforms has served its role as primary discourse of public engagement. On the contrary, the freedom of speech and unregulated content delivery has resulted into increase in fake news and misinformation.

increase in political polarization, decline in rational democratic debate, ^{increase in} narrative warfare, and many others. The ongoing increase in cyberbullying cases, gender disparities in rural areas, and digital distrust scenarios among masses has questioned the credibility of freedom of speech in digital platforms. The decline of public trust in state institutions followed by uncontrolled piracy concerns has aggravated the situation's severity and complexity. However, regulation dilemma of the state, enforcement of cyberlaws and lack of legal digital literacy has challenged the legitimacy of freedom of speech in digital platforms in some underdeveloped countries. Therefore, prioritizing public trust building measures and enforcement of cyberlaws are suggested to bridge the gap of legitimization of digital platforms in some underdeveloped countries. Mark Twain has stated:

**"Continuous Improvement Is
Better Than Delayed Perfection."**
