



A Study On The Perception Of The Youth Regarding Role Of Social Media In Creating Political Polarisation In India.

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Abstract:

Social media has been playing a significant role in influencing the way people think and has a significant impact on how modern mass communication works. Consuming social media on a daily basis has provoked an influence amongst the users specifically regarding the content that was circulated often. Political leaders too were quick to pick up on this trend and are now extensively spending time, money, and efforts on the various social media platforms to influence voters' political opinions to create the polarization. In the General Election of 2019, the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media accounts of popular political parties such as the BJP and Congress recorded millions of followers. On twitter itself, BJP had recorded over 11 million followers prior to the election where as Congress recorded 5 million followers resulting out of major digital promotional campaigns by the parties.

Purpose : This paper looks at the perception of youth regarding the role social media in creating political polarisation through its content that has social, cognitive, and political inclinations, especially in the context of India. This paper aims to study the awareness amongst the young social media users regarding political polarisation that exists on social media.

Methodology : The methodology used to collect data for this paper is quantitative in nature. Primary data was collected via the mode of online survey (through google forms) and the research is descriptive in nature.

The research was conducted in the month of November 2022.

The questionnaire was circulated online to social media users of the target segment under the age group 16 to 30. The questionnaire was prepared to collect data via the method of eliciting online public opinion along with close ended multiple-choice questions.

The sample size or the total number of respondents for the research were 300.

Survey- The survey can be defined as an attempt to collect relevant information and insights through the data collection. This process involves the designing of a questionnaire and circulating it online. The 300 respondents are from either of these the three age groups of 16-20, 21-25, and 26-30 and are almost equal in number of males and females. This selection is based on the random sampling method. Random sampling is a kind of technique which is used to select a respondent without any biased approach. In this sampling, each of the respondents has an opportunity for being selected in the process. Questionnaires contain over all 20 questions. These questions are divided into two broad categories. The first part consists of information based on the demographic variable. The second part includes Likert Scale based questions where respondents were asked to choose from number 1 to 5 on the basis of their agreement. The selection of social media is based on the users.

Findings :

The influence of social media platforms evolves around the theme of behavioural impact it causes on its users by different means of showcasing content. Social media algorithms are tested rigorously and developed specifically to retain user's attention and impact the way they think and perform actions in social settings. Politically as well, social media has been creating a major impact on one's decision making. The content uploaded by political parties does push people to create a perception about a social or political issue. The literature review of the research also hints in the way how social media fuels partisan politics and the data collected in the above research states that there is no significance between demographic variables and awareness of political polarisation. Irrespective of age groups, individuals who use social media feel that political content is influencing in nature. **Contribution :** The theoretical implications of this research could be considering the benefits occurred in understanding the perception of youth regarding the role of social media in creating political polarisation. The research highlighted social media users do feel certain influence of the content seen and rely on it to make major important decisions of their life. It also signifies how social media does not have any demographic limitations, when it comes to the consumption rate or impact of the content. From which we can understand that any one who consumes content irrespective of their demographic categorisation will have some impact on their decision making.

Keywords : important words in the entire research.

- Polarisation
- Ideological polarisation
- Political Polarisation
- Social media
- Political communication
- Indian Politics
- Partisan Politics

I. INTRODUCTION

Agenda setting has always been an integral part of mass communication. Different mass communication mediums have used means at their disposal to convey a well-crafted message that could be economical, political, cultural, or social in nature. Political polarisation becomes significant to most individuals as one of the most significant sources of power is a result of having an influence on the political agenda and the political discourse in the mass mediums. (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). Populism has always been the apt route to power and social media becomes a powerful tool to disperse political campaigns and influence people's voting mindset in one go.

While the effects of political polarisation in traditional forms of media was difficult to track, digital media channels allow us to monitor conversations and derive apt insights about how often a topic has been discussed, how have people responded to a particular kind of content and detailed surveys can also allow us to understand how much of an influence does this content have on an individual's voting pattern. While political polarisation can be of different types (interactional, positional, affective, etc) This paper focuses on affective polarisation to specifically understand the effects that political motivated content has on an individual's attitudes and emotions expressed.

Today, social media consumption has become an irreplaceable part of every individual's life. In 2022, 4.74 billion people currently use social media worldwide which currently equals 59.3% of the global population. (Kepios Company, 2022).

Individually considering the insights by Meta, the parent company of major social media platforms- Instagram and Facebook, data signifies that Facebook has 2.7 billion monthly active users, Instagram has 1 billion monthly active users and almost approximately 67% of these users fall under the age group of 16 to 30.

This paper analyses how the youth (age group 16-30) perceives political polarisation that has now become a significant part of the political content present over social media. While considering variables such as Education level, Gender, and frequency of political content seen on social media, this paper aims to understand two key objectives-

1. To find out the awareness of youth regarding social media creating political polarisation.
2. Contribution of social media in decision making process of the youth.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology section outlines the plan and method that how the study is conducted. This includes Universe of the study, sample of the study, Data and Sources of Data, study's variables and analytical framework. The details are as follows;

The methodology used to collect data for this paper is quantitative in nature.

Population and Sample

Primary data was collected via the mode of online survey (through google forms) and the research is descriptive in nature.

The research was conducted in the month of October 2022 to January 2023.

The questionnaire was circulated online to social media users of the target segment under the age group 16 to 30. The questionnaire was prepared to collect data via the method of eliciting online public opinion along with close ended multiple-choice questions.

The sample size or the total number of respondents for the research were 300.

Data and Sources of Data

For this study primary data has been collected via Survey. The survey can be defined as an attempt to collect relevant information and insights through the data collection. This process involves the designing of questionnaire and circulating it online. The 74 respondents are from either of these the three age groups of 16-20, 21-25, and 26-30 and are almost equal number of males and females. This selection is based on the random sampling method. A random sampling is a kind of technique which is used to select a respondent without any biased approach. In this sampling, each of the respondent has an opportunity for being selected in the process. Questionnaires contains over all 20 questions. These questions are divided into two broad categories. The first part consists of information based on the demographic variable. The second part includes Likert Scale based questions where respondents were asked to choose from number 1 to 5 based on their agreement. The selection of social media is based on the users.

Theoretical framework

This paper refers to various mass communication theories such as the Media Dependency Theory, the Hypodermic Needle Theory and the Agenda Setting theory.

The paper primarily considers Media Dependency because The Media Dependency theory is a structured method of investigating how mass media impacts audiences and how media, audiences, and societal systems interact with each other. Hence, while focusing upon social media as a mass medium, the paper tries to understand the impact social media as a medium has on the youth.

The hypodermic needle theory as the questionnaire of the research aims to understand whether the provocative language and visuals used in these political posts seen on social media can instantly create an impact on the reader’s mind.

Agenda setting in terms of mass communication is a concept that refers to the media’s capacity to impact the significance assigned to topics on the public agenda. According to this theory, the media can influence public perception by choosing which issues receive the greatest focus. This idea has been extensively analysed and used in different types of media. While understanding the effect of political polarisation, this paper focuses upon whether the political agenda set on social media platforms effects decision making of the youth.

This theoretical framework of this research tries to understand how Social media benefits from various theoretical perspectives to understand the effects of social media on individuals and society. Media Dependency theory can provide insights into how individuals become reliant on social media for information and communication. Agenda setting theory can be useful to understand how social media can influence public opinion and shape the issues that receive attention. Cultivation theory can help in exploring the long-term effects of social media exposure on individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Additionally, other theories such as Social Learning theory, Social Comparison theory, and Uses and Gratification theory can also offer useful frameworks for studying the impact of social media on different aspects of human behavior and social interaction.

Statistical tools and econometric models

IBM SPSS Statistics 28 Version
Microsoft Excel (For Regression Analysis)

Descriptive Statistics

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Profile of Respondents-

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1- Profile of Respondents

Statistics

		Age Group	Gender	Education Level	What social media channels are you most active on? Choose many as applicable.	How many hours do you spend on social media every day?	How frequently do you come across politics-related posts on your social media feed?	How many accounts of political leaders or parties or political news outlets do you follow on social media?
N	Valid	300	300	300	300	300	300	304
	Missing	4	4	4	4	4	4	0
Mean		1.28	1.46	1.94	3.10	2.34	2.05	
Median		1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	
Mode		1	1	2	1	2	2	
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1	
Maximum		3	2	3	9	4	4	

Frequency Table

Table 2- Age Profile of Respondents

Age Group		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	227	74.7	75.7	75.7
	2	63	20.7	21.0	96.7
	3	10	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	300	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.3		
Total		304	100.0		

Table 3- Gender Profile of Respondents

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	161	53.0	53.7	53.7
	2	139	45.7	46.3	100.0
	Total	300	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.3		
Total		304	100.0		

Table 4- Educational Level of Respondents

Education Level		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	39	12.8	13.0	13.0
	2	240	78.9	80.0	93.0
	3	21	6.9	7.0	100.0
	Total	300	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.3		
Total		304	100.0		

Table 5- Respondent's choice of Social Media Platform

What social media channels are you most active on? Choose as many as are applicable.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	121	39.8	40.3	40.3
	2	50	16.4	16.7	57.0
	3	21	6.9	7.0	64.0
	4	26	8.6	8.7	72.7
	5	23	7.6	7.7	80.3
	6	21	6.9	7.0	87.3
	7	17	5.6	5.7	93.0
	8	8	2.6	2.7	95.7
	9	13	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	300	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.3		
Total		304	100.0		

Table 6- Time spent of social media by respondents

How many hours do you spend on social media every day?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	32	10.5	10.7	10.7
	2	161	53.0	53.7	64.3
	3	81	26.6	27.0	91.3
	4	26	8.6	8.7	100.0
	Total	300	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.3		
Total		304	100.0		

Table 7- Frequency of posts coming on social media
How frequently do you come across politics-related posts on your social media feed?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	89	29.3	29.7	29.7
	2	134	44.1	44.7	74.3
	3	49	16.1	16.3	90.7
	4	28	9.2	9.3	100.0
	Total	300	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.3		
Total		304	100.0		

Table 8- Number of political accounts followed by respondents
How many accounts of political leaders or parties or political news outlets do you follow on social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		4	1.3	1.3	1.3
	1	245	80.6	80.6	81.9
	2	29	9.5	9.5	91.4
	3	16	5.3	5.3	96.7
	4	10	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	304	100.0	100.0	

2. Inferential Statistics-

- H01- There is no relation between demographic variables and awareness of social media platforms creating political polarisation.
- H11- There is a significant relation between demographic variables and awareness of social media platforms creating political polarisation.
- H02- According to the youth, social media significantly contributes to political decision-making.
- H12- According to the youth, social media does not significantly contribute to political decision-making.
- Testing H01 & H11

Using SPSS to find the relationship between demographic variables and awareness of social media platforms by doing T tests on all demographic variables except gender on which ANOVA is being used.

Statement used to compare demographic variables is the following question from the questionnaire (Likert scale based - where audiences had to select numbers 1 to 5 where 5 indicates the highest level of agreement and 1 indicates the lowest)

- A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.

ANOVA

Table 9- Anova for the question- "A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting."

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.227	1	1.227	1.484	.224
Within Groups	246.440	298	.827		
Total	247.667	299			

Table 10- Group Statistics for Age Group

Group Statistics

	Age Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	16-20	227	3.19	.916	.061
	21-25	63	3.44	.857	.108

Table 11- Independence Samples Test for Age Group

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	Equal variances assumed	.122	.727	-1.948	288	.052	-.251	.129	-.504	.003
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.022	104.606	.046	-.251	.124	-.496	-.005

Table 12- Group Statistics for Educational Level

T-Test

Group Statistics					
	Education Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	10th	39	2.85	.961	.154
	12th	240	3.30	.887	.057

Table 13- Independent Samples Test for Educational Level

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	Equal variances assumed	.607	.437	-2.902	277	.004	-.450	.155	-.755	-.145
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.739	49.103	.009	-.450	.164	-.780	-.120

Table 14- Group Statistics for choice of social media platforms

T-Test

Group Statistics					
	What social media channels are you most active on? Choose as many as are applicable.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	Instagram	122	3.28	.884	.080
	Instagram and Facebook	49	2.98	1.031	.147

Table 15- Independent Samples Test for choice of social media platforms

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	Equal variances assumed	1.767	.186	1.906	169	.058	.299	.157	-.011	.609
	Equal variances not assumed			1.785	77.854	.078	.299	.168	-.035	.633

Table 16- Group Statistics for hours spent on social media

T-Test

Group Statistics					
How many hours do you spend on social media every day?					
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	1-3	32	3.53	.950	.168
	4-6	160	3.19	.962	.076

Table 17- Independent Samples Test for hours spent on social media platforms

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
A political party's social media presence helps me make my decision while voting.	Equal variances assumed	.175	.676	1.816	190	.071	.337	.186	-.029	.704
	Equal variances not assumed			1.831	44.643	.074	.337	.184	-.034	.709

- Testing H02 & H12

Using Simple Regression to test H02 & H12 on Microsoft excel.

Y Range- Dependent Variable- I believe social media is the key factor in influencing one's political ideology.

X Range- Independent Variable- Age Group

Table 18- Simple Regression

SUMMARY OUTPUT									
Regression Statistics									
Multiple R	0.031638								
R Square	0.001001								
Adjusted R Square	-0.00235								
Standard Error	0.837336								
Observations	300								
ANOVA									
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F				
Regression	1	0.209346	0.209346	0.298583	0.585181				
Residual	298	208.9373	0.701132						
Total	299	209.1467							
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%	
Intercept	3.45196	0.128899	26.78026	2.65E-81	3.198291	3.705628	3.198291	3.705628	
X Variable 1	-0.05114	0.093596	-0.54643	0.585181	-0.23534	0.133049	-0.23534	0.133049	

3. Findings and Analysis-

Gender- According to the Anova Test done in the research to find the relationship between demographic variable- Gender and awareness of social media platforms, between group variation is high compared to within group variation, the f statistic is higher, hence the correspondent p value (sig.) is lower. So, we reject our alternative hypothesis, which means the groups means are equal. The between groups mean square is 1.227, within group is 0.827, so within group is higher than between group, so we reject our alternative hypothesis claiming all group means are equal.

This means that there was no difference in the decision making between the groups when it came to political party's social media presence.

Age Group-

According to the independent sample t test data, while conducting the Levene's test, the significance value is 0.52, (which is greater than 0.5), hence equal variances are assumed. This has met the assumption of homogeneity of variants.

This means that age does play a role in decision making between the groups when it came to political party's social media presence.

Educational Level-

According to the independent sample t test data, while conducting the Levene's test, the significance value is 0.437, (which is lesser than 0.5), equal variances are not assumed.

According to the T table, Significance value is 0.4, that means the result is significant at 0.5, hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and accept the alternate hypothesis.

This means that Educational does play a role in decision making when it came to political party's social media presence.

What Social Media Channels are you active on? -

Since the findings were not statistically significant, it can be implied that the type of social media platform does not play any role in the decision making when it came to political party's social media presence.

How many hours do you spend on social media every day?-

Since the findings were not statistically significant, it can be implied that the hours spend on social media platform does not play any role in the decision making when it came to political party's social media presence.

Since the value of coefficient of determination is zero, it can be stated that the belief in social media as a key factor in influencing political ideology can not be explained by the age group one belongs to.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Enhancing media literacy: This paper aims to help individuals develop critical thinking skills and become more media literate, which can help them navigate the increasingly complex and polarized media landscape.

Improving public discourse: Understanding the drivers of political polarization can help individuals engage in more constructive and civil political discourse, which can help reduce political gridlock and promote consensus building.

Supporting community building: This paper intends to help identify strategies for promoting community building and social cohesion, which can help reduce political polarization and foster greater understanding and cooperation between different groups.

Enhancing democratic participation: By understanding the factors that contribute to political polarization, research can help identify ways to increase democratic participation and engagement, which can help strengthen democratic institutions and processes.

Enhancing digital literacy: This paper can help individuals develop understand political polarisation and consider digital literacy skills, such as critical thinking and information evaluation of the youth while considering influence, which can help them navigate social media more effectively and responsibly.

Limitations

Following are the limitations of this research-

- **Small sample size-** The above research was conducted on a very small group of participants. Only 300 respondents were included in the study, making the sample size small. This has led to heavy generalisation from 300 respondents to 'youth'.
- **Lack of previous research studies on the topic in India-** While conducting the literature review, it was observed that very few researches had discussed political polarisation caused by social media in India. Hence, to refer previous material, research papers based on similar topics such as political polarisation, influence of social media, etc were used.
- **Only online mode of data collection-** To collect the data only online survey mode via google forms was used, if data collection would have been done via multiple means, a huge set of audience could have been reached.
- **Time constraints-** The research was done under the span of three months, leading to time constraints.

Conclusions

Social media has become increasingly important in the current socio-political scenario for several reasons. First, social media platforms have become an essential tool for political communication, with politicians and political parties using social media to reach and engage with voters. Social media has also become a key platform for political activism and social movements, enabling individuals and groups to organize and mobilize more effectively.

Second, social media has become a primary source of news and information for many people, with a significant proportion of the population relying on social media for their news consumption. This has implications for the quality and accuracy of news and information, as well as for the potential for misinformation and disinformation to spread rapidly on social media.

Third, social media has become an important tool for social interaction and community building, enabling individuals to connect with others who share similar interests, beliefs, and values. This can have both positive and negative effects, with social media facilitating both the formation of supportive communities and the amplification of polarizing and divisive rhetoric.

In summary, social media has become a critical component of the current socio-political scenario, impacting political communication, news consumption, social activism, and community building. Understanding the role and impact of social media is, therefore, essential for individuals, organizations, and policymakers seeking to navigate and shape the socio-political landscape.

This research specifically focuses on how political polarisation has been largely affected by 2 major aspects- Educational Qualification and the number of hours spent on social media. Other demographics such as age or the type of social media platforms are not as significant.

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