Networked Politics: How social media reshaped power, protest and public opinion in Arunachal Pradesh.

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Abstract:

Social media platforms are widely used as a means of communication across the world, and India is no exception. Utilization of Social Media has grown out of proportion that people across all Indian states actively engage in this platform. These platforms have transformed the way people interact with one another. In the pre-internet era, people relied on traditional methods of mass communication such as television, radio, newspapers, and pamphlets. Now, the accessibility of affordable internet and the widespread availability of mobile phones have made communication much more feasible and faster. Social media has emerged as a significant part of daily life. It has also become an important political tool for both the masses and leaders. Social media is extensively used for political mobilization, organizing social movements against injustice, and raising awareness about issue-based causes.

Keyword: Social media, Social Movement, Arunachal Pradesh

Introduction:

Social media platforms are widely used as a means of communication across the world, and India is no exception. Utilisation of Social Media has grown out of proportion that people across Indian states actively engage in this platform. These platforms have transformed the way people interact with one another. In the pre-internet era, people relied on traditional methods of mass communication such as television, radio, newspapers, and pamphlets. Now, the accessibility of affordable internet and the widespread availability of mobile phones have made communication much more feasible and faster. Social media has emerged as a significant part of daily life. It has also become an important political tool for both the masses and leaders. Social media is widely used for political mobilization, organizing social movements against injustice, and raising awareness about issue-based causes. Studies indicate that the relationship between social media use and political participation is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both merit and demerit. On merit side social media can enhance political awareness, promote inclusivity, and boost voter turnout, especially by marginalized communities a platform their concerns (Richarson, 2017).

Arunachal Pradesh, a state located in the Northeast, India with a rich unique culture and is home to diverse ethnic languages is steadily entering in the digital era and showing growing engagement with social media. The growing presence of youth and leaders on social media has made the state in term of communication and information more open interactive and inclusive. Evidence gathered in Arunachal Pradesh suggests that Facebook has emerged as

a key campaign tool, with most contesting candidates using it to engage voters.(savior & lowang, 2025). Disruptions of internet could also trigger or intensify mass protests which is an emerging phenomenon as seen during Permanent Residents Certificate(PRC) controversy in Arunachal Pradesh. Objective of this paper is to study the impacts of social media on the protest and public opinion of Arunachal Pradesh.

Methodology:

The study adopts descriptive and analytical methods. Information is based on secondary sources of data such as articles, books, research papers, websites and other sources.

Social Media and its impact on protest and public opinion of Arunachal Pradesh (objective)

Social media has become an emerging ground for voices that could not reach to the government authority. Dissent usually take the road of using its own social media presence so that their voice could be share and reach to almost everyone at a short period of time. In a state like Arunachal Pradesh where many tribal and local issues receive limited attention from mainstream national media, digital platforms help fill this informational vacuum. Studies shows that a significant section of Arunachal's youth now rely more on social media than traditional newspapers or television for learning about local politics, leaders, and policy debates (taba, 2025). Most of the youth are engaged and exchanged information through social media.. The widespread use of Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram is evident across at all level of society.

The findings indicate a majority of Arunachali youth (65%) rely on social media as their primary source of political information, significantly surpassing newspapers (40%) and television (30%) in terms of preference (tali, 2022). Social media amplifies protests and shapes public opinion, as demonstrated by public engagement surrounding the Naharlagun traffic issue. In 2025, a significant stretch of National Highway 415 (NH-415) a major route connecting Naharlagun with Itanagar and other parts of Arunachal Pradesh due to delay and absence of proper plannning of road construction resident consistently reported that the worsening road conditions and repeated diversions caused significant delays, excessive dust, and unsafe daily travel conditions (The Arunachal times, 2025). Through mass media this problem gain widespread attention among all the residents. People started taking photographs and recording videos to post on their social media accounts, receiving likes and comments. Visual posts made the frustration visible even to people who weren't stuck in traffic, building broader awareness. It led to Critique of government policy making it harder for authorities to ignore. Social, political, and climate issues are becoming more urgent every day. We are living in a time of multiple crises, and the opportunity to act effectively is shrinking each year without meaningful action. Problems related to the environment, development, corruption, and climate change are no longer distant concerns they are already affecting people's daily lives. Because these issues are fast-moving and deeply connected to society, people need quick ways to share information and raise awareness. Social media and other forms of digital communication serve as fast and immediate channels for disseminating information during crises. These platforms not only accelerate the flow of information but also stimulate public discussion and inspire collective participation. Social media also allows individuals and groups to organize movements, mobilize supporters, and apply pressure on governments by translating online expressions of concern into coordinated action. Digital space has played a role in empowering youth and marginalised voices. People no longer rely on traditional media to raise the issue due to time inconsistency whereas issue can be raise in social media at anytime and anywhere. Every individual voices matter that could be heard by everyone. Issue can be analysed from different perspectives which create environment for public discourse, discussion and debate in the society. Social media function as a tool for strengthening political accountability. Public opinion on social media can put pressure on policymakers and highlight the Gap and vacuum in the policy related development, social issue and environmental issue. Social media helps set the agenda of masses which usually get ignored by state machinery. Presence of social media amplify the unheard voices and make it more visible in the society. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms do not rely on formal editorial gatekeeping, allowing content to circulate organically based on user engagement (Gangte & Joseph, 2024). Digital platforms especially facebook, significantly influenced the course of the Siang Dam protest in Arunachal Pradesh. Through social media platforms the Siang dam protest gained support from across the region and exerted pressure on the government. This helped them quickly mobilize local opposition and organize protests.

Public opinion on social media can put pressure on policymakers and highlight governance gaps from infrastructure, development and administrative delays. But this comes with complexity that is Misinformation & Disinformation Risk. In the Northeast, where digital literacy has traditionally been lower than the national average, measures like fact-checking, platform takedowns, and legal penalties often fail to keep up with the swift spread of misinformation(tyagi & chakravarty, 2025). Through Social media masses exercise their fundamental right of Speech and expression however verification of such opinion is limited. Public opinion sometimes regulated by their emotions and could not weightage much fact. These trends later lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding becoming hurdle and inconvenience make it harder to trust what's shared and can deepen divisions if unchecked. Sometimes it led to misinterpret of laws. An example from Arunachal Pradesh illustrates this dynamic when the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act - a law from 1978, following a court-directed move to update its rules, social media quickly filled with reactions. Many users started sharing their own explanations, concerns, and opinions about the law's meaning and possible impact (Hubnetwork,2025). Such interpretations were shared widely even before government clarification, leading to widespread suspicion and concern among netizens. There are structural reasons for this sequence that is speed of communication**.** Social media spreads information very fast.

Conclusion: Using social media to educate people requires a careful and responsible approach, especially when reaching those who are directly affected by crises and do not have access to traditional media platforms. At the same time, unregulated social media spaces can create serious social, political, and psychological risks by allowing misinformation, hate speech, and misleading content to spread quickly. Social media has strong potential to encourage creativity, meaningful discussion, and the exchange of new ideas. However, this potential can only be fully achieved when there are proper guidelines and regulations that ensure accountability and promote responsible use.

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