



Social Media as a Potent Weapon: A Study of 'X' on Indian Polity

Umesh C. Pathak

Associate Professor and Head of Department, Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Management Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, India

Corresponding author: hodjournalism@mains.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the significant role of social media in Indian political system. Social media has emerged as a potent weapon in the 21st century, wielding significant influence in various domains. Its ability to disseminate information rapidly, mobilize masses, and shape public opinion has transformed it into a tool for social and political change, activism, and even oppression. This abstract explores the multifaceted nature of social media as a potent weapon, examining its positive and negative implications. It will delve into its role in facilitating social movements, amplifying marginalized voices, and promoting democratic participation. Conversely, it will also analyze its potential for spreading misinformation, manipulating public discourse, and fueling polarization and conflict. The study aims to understand the role and impact of social media specifically X platform on Indian social movements, Indian governance and democratic dynamics.

Keywords: Social Media, Microblogging sites, Networking sites, Twitter

Social Media reflects the real world and is all about conversations among masses. Social media facilitates the interactive web by engaging users to *participate in, comment on and create content* as means of communicating with other users at large. It has emerged as one of the strongest weapons where citizens are able to discuss the issues of the day to day life and also of national and international importance. In the 21st century, Facebook, Instagram, "X" (formerly Twitter) and YouTube are not just innovations in the cyber world, but are fast emerging as influencers and determinants of public opinion.

In 2011, when the social media platforms especially twitter was emerging, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has mentioned twitter as a potent weapon (June. Governance Now, 2011).

A social networking service is a platform to build

social networks. These social network services are web based and these provide means for users to interact over the Internet. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network. Thus, social media is a two-way avenue that doesn't just give one information, but it also provides platforms for interaction with and across the users within and beyond one's friends', contacts' or followers' lists simultaneously. This interaction can be in the form of invited comments or letting you vote on an article, or recommending movies to you based on the ratings of other people with similar interests.

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All the forms of social media have influenced many aspects of our life; be it education, culture, administration, marketing, businesses or politics. They have been able to make profound impact by means of news, interaction, learning and marketing. They have become an important source of news. Various news channels tweet or give updates on significant happenings all over the world and the news quickly gets passed around the networks in ways never experienced before. They allow people to keep in touch more regularly. People in different cities, countries and continents can keep in touch effortlessly through the virtual platforms of communication such as Facebook, “X”, Instagram, etc. They also create an opportunity to experience different cultures and exchange opinions. Social media have also played a large part in fostering learning. Children who start using the social media platforms develop early communication skills, and generally become more literate. The whole dynamics of marketing have been changed. Companies are becoming more consumer-centred through interactions made over social media. They are able to understand the needs of the market from the market itself.

Social media has led to the emergence of citizen-led governance in India. Anti-corruption movement by Anna Hazare and protests followed by Nirbhaya gang rape in 2012, Jadavpur University Protest in 2014, JNU Protest in 2016, Metoo Movement in 2018, CAA-NRC Protest in 2019 and Farmer’s Movement in 2021-2022 were channelized through the social media avenues. These events garnered enormous national and global support by involving the common man by these platforms.

“X”: That little blue bird can spread the word

“X” is a ‘microblogging’ system that allows you to send and receive short posts called tweets. Tweets can be up to 280 characters long and can include links to relevant websites and resources. “X” users follow other users. If you follow someone you can see their tweets in your “X” ‘timeline’. You can choose to follow people and organisations

with similar academic and personal interests to you. You can create your own tweets or you can retweet information that has been tweeted by others. Retweeting means that information can be shared quickly and efficiently with a large number of people.

In modern era, Social media has become an integral part of our lives. Facebook, WhatsApp and “X” are new modes to provide news faster than most news channels today. Celebrities, sports stars, politicians and corporate heads are present on these media platforms so that they can keep in touch with people. They keep their fans and followers informed of latest updates, promote their work and listen to what people have to say. “X” is most popular and easy to handle among these social media leading to the rapid increase of its users.

India is the third largest user of “X” in the world, with an estimated 36 million active users in 2019. Market researcher group E-marketer estimates that “X” will have around 40 million users in India by 2020. That is a sizable number among “X” users’ countries. It leaves us with no surprise, thus, to see the political parties reach out to voters with the help of social media arms such as “X”. During last few years there is a trend in Indian politics to tweet or retweet any important or relevant message. Many politicians have also taken to social media like a most awaited mode of communication. The best examples are our Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal. PM Narendra Modi is the most-followed Indian on “X”. The “X” handle, @narendramodi, with its 104.8 million² followers, speaks volume of his popularity. The updates on Facebook and “X” keep us informed about the latest happenings and future plans. In line with the global trend, social media has been increasingly used by Indian politicians for routine political communication to directly connect with their supporters. However, unethical practices online by political actors have led to a spike in violence and affected decision-making on the national security front. Using social media to bypass traditional media and ignore critics, Modi has developed a distinct style of political communication

that is interactive and continuous. His successful use of social media for political agenda building and policy crowdsourcing and publicity is evident in pan-India campaigns such as Swacch Bharat (Clean India) (Rodrigues and Niemann 2017) and the recently-launched Fit India Movement, a nationwide campaign, which encourages citizens to take up physical activity and sports in their daily lives. "X" has also played a crucial role during the COVID-19 in Indian governance.

There are few more politicians who became popular by positively using this medium like ex Minister of external affairs let Sushma Swaraj and Ex. Minister of Railway, Suresh Prabhu. The way Shushma Swaraj made use of "X" to help Indians across the world is no secret. In fact, even the Opposition has taken note with AAP's Bhagwant Maan saying, "I want to thank Sushma Swaraj ji. She is doing an exceptionally good job to save our people abroad." Maan said this in the Lok Sabha referring to how Swaraj rescued 13 members of his constituency who had been enslaved in Saudi Arabia in 2016. From reuniting families to helping citizens recover their passport and travel home safe, every request for help, whether small or big, gets the minister's attention. And in this spirit of accountability what she has been able to achieve during her tenure as a minister for external affairs will be remembered for long. It's important to realise that "X" is only a vehicle—the message is the issue, not the medium. As an MP or political persona, can reach out to more people through "X" to largest mass rally can ever ensure. That's why, after all the criticism; so many leaders have taken to this medium.

Role of "X" during general elections

There was a great impact of "X" on the 2014 general election. The success of BJP's online campaign in 2014 Lok Sabha election was phenomenal. It was probably one of the most awaited elections where all social media tools were used by Bhartiya Janata Party. Other parties also went up with the same way. All parties played war to spend on social media. It saw social media as a new battleground.

Narendra Modi emerged as India's most powerful political figure on social media. The conventional ways of *sending messages, recorded calls, and public gatherings* were not seen much. This election saw politicians leveraging. Social media used to reach out to constituents like never before. The result was unprecedented and the same happened during the general election of 2019 and 2024 in India where "Twitter" war was more interesting among the political parties. "X" emerged as the most favourite amongst the social media tools for political persons³.

From the very beginning, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has the strong social presence. The BJP started using the social medium even before the 2009 general election. Mr. Narendra Modi, the then Prime Ministerial candidate of BJP and all other members of BJP had very high popularity and a reach to the general public using social media as compared to any other parties. Narendra Modi has the highest follower on "X" and Facebook. The study found that the BJP's "X" feed dealt with campaign updates (28 percent) and criticism of other political parties or moves (24 percent). It also posted the second-highest in proportion and the highest in absolute numbers of self-promotion tweets (19 percent as against AAP's 35 percent). Thus, it won't be incorrect to say that **the role of social media in politics has been inevitable over the years.**

What the "X" provided to Indian Polity

In the context of the relationship between politicians, social media, and the public, a number of functions that the Internet has can be identified as follows:

- ⦿ Politicians promote their controlled speech and present their point of view without being interrupted by journalists or by the limitations of media format.
- ⦿ Social media has given privilege for politicians to post a presumptive political agenda.
- ⦿ By means of social media, political parties or politicians can mobilize the public and invites them to participate in the discussion on some issues of public interest.
- ⦿ By using the social media tools, politicians and political parties interact apparently and

more efficiently with their supporters, beyond institutional and bureaucratic rigors.

How social networking site “X” has affected politics

1. **How to Go Viral with Campaign:** “X” and Facebook have become instrumental in organizing campaigns. They allow like-minded voters and activists to easily share news and information such as campaign events with each other. X helps the campaign with title visibility, real-time engagement and traffic on website. It helps in targeting audience based on their interest and demography. Also allows measuring the results of the campaign.
2. **Use of Hashtag:** With the correct use of #hashtag, one can easily access the post and this makes post discoverable to a captive audience. It also helps in finding similar conversations to get involved in and increase your social impact at no cost. Several social movements became popular in very less time with the help of hashtags only.
3. **Direct Contact to Voters:** Social media tools including Facebook, “X” and YouTube allow politicians to speak directly to voters without spending a single penny.
4. **Controversy:** Direct access to voters also has its downsides. Handlers, opinion leaders and public-relations professionals often manage a candidate’s image, and for good reason: Allowing a politician to send out unfiltered tweets or Facebook posts has landed many a candidate in hot water or in embarrassing situations.
5. **Altering the Message to the Audience:** Political campaigns can tap into a wealth of information or analytics about the people who are following them on social media and customize their messages based on selected demographics.
6. **Advertising without Paying:** It has become fairly common for political campaigns to produce commercials and publish them for free on YouTube instead of, or in addition to, paying for time on television or the radio.
7. **Creating Public Opinion:** Politicians can

then adjust their campaigns accordingly, in real time, without the use of high-priced consultants or expensive polling.

8. **Question of Freedom of Expressions:** Many times a banned on twitter like situation has arose due to breach of Indian law. In 2021, during the Farmer’s protest to withdraw farm laws, twitter was warned by the government to shutdown certain accounts for spreading misinformation and having vested interests.
9. **Impact of Social Media on Polity:** Studies show that different social movements took place in India in past decade has contributed to the emergence of a radically new social and political structure. Social media has pivotally supported in doing so. The combined pressure of social movements and social media has compelled government to rethink on their decisions and work on new ideas to make inclusive policies.
10. **Helps to build Peace:** The social media sites like ‘X’ can prevent conflicts and help to spread peace and encourage dialogue among people from different backgrounds. This also can stop violence and protect society from misinformation. There are several examples in India, when movements like Farmer’s protest in 2021 and CAA-NRC protest 2016 have fuelled the violence against the established government and ban on social media sites were imposed. But, being the responsible platforms, these sites have blocked such accounts spreading misinformation and misguided the society especially young blood. They have expressed the voices of truth and peace. ‘X’ then twitter announced on the public statement on February 10, 2021 that *“we have not taken any action on accounts that consists new media entities and journalist activities. This is their fundamental law to free expression under the constitution of India”*.

CONCLUSION

The advent of social media has changed how politics is being organised and conducted, as well as the nature of political communication in India. On the one hand, social media has allowed for

the democratisation of politics and re-energised the political landscape. The Indian political System is very much affected by social networking platforms like 'X'.

These leaders believe in inclusive growth and have always encouraged the youth to participate in politics. Young politicians of 21st century India have effectively adopted social media because they know the nerve of the new India's young voters. They believe that it is instrumental to build new India for Generation Beta.

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