Research Paper

Studying the Role of Social Media in Shaping Perceptions of Political Discourse among Indian Youth

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ABSTRACT

The impact of social media on political perception has been steadily increasing. Exploring how social media affects people's understanding of their political beliefs and the political parties they identify with is crucial to learning how politics operates in the country. Social media has transformed the way people communicate, access information, and engage in political discussions, and it has become an influential tool in shaping public opinion and political discourse. However, social media can also present several challenges and risks, such as the spread of misinformation and fake news, online harassment and hate speech, and the creation of echo chambers (Palano, D., 2019). This qualitative study aims to understand the impact of social media on the perception of youth about the political discourses in India. It also focuses on understanding the formation of echo chambers. The study uses an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach to understand how people perceive the impact of social media. 11 participants were taken in and they underwent a semi-structured interview. On filtering the content, 10 participants were chosen. Through thematic analysis, the study found 4 major emerging themes - polarisation, echo chambers, the influence of social media on the perception of politics, and strategies to use social media effectively.

Keywords: *Social Media, Polarisation, Political Discourses, Echo Chambers*

The role that social media plays in shaping the political perceptions of the population has been steadily growing in number. From Barack Obama's 'Facebook Election' to the Arab Spring, social media has been shaping the political views and preferences of people around the world. The positive side of this would be 'Clicktivism', a theory that suggests social media's active role in bringing about a platform to bring about innovative methods of improving civic engagement (Halupka, M., 2014). On the flip side, this increased use of social media as the only form of garnering information regarding politics

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has contributed to increasing hyper-political marketing. This is a type of marketing used by politicians to target updates and news based on the voter data they acquire through social media. This targeted bombarding of information about one particular political group can end up creating an 'information bubble' thus leading to a bubble democracy. A bubble democracy is a phenomenon that involves users reinforcing their already existing political views and values rather than seeking out diverse perspectives. This leads to the increased creation of echo chambers and polarization among the population (Palano, D., 2019). One notable concern is the potential impact of social media on the formation of echo chambers – isolated online spaces where individuals are exposed primarily to information and perspectives that align with their existing beliefs and ideologies. This phenomenon has the potential to reinforce cognitive biases, limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, and contribute to a polarized information landscape. These echo chambers are a growing cause of concern because of the stagnant homogeneity of the ideas and propaganda being discussed in them as they actively oppress any channels for opinion challenges that could open new areas of discussion, an aspect core to the theme of democracy.

There have been numerous studies on the impact of social media and politics in the Western context but limited ones in India. India is one of the countries with the highest number of adolescents and young adults in the world. This points to the increasing power of social media as it is a major medium of communication and expression of ideas among the youth of our country. Unfortunately, how this tool shapes the minds of the most vulnerable population regarding the governance of the entire country has surprisingly not been studied. This research has been conducted to help understand the same and give an insight into the various processes that underlie the influence and outcomes of social media as one of the sole advocates of information gain and understanding among them and has several theoretical underpinnings.

The filter bubble theory states that individuals are surrounded by a "bubble" of news and content on social media that confirms their previous opinions, as a result, people may become more insulated from opposing political viewpoints and have their preexisting opinions strengthened (Pariser, E., 2011). Explaining one of the facilitators of this phenomenon, the two-step flow theory states that opinion leaders who frequently appear on social media are essential in mediating information between the public and media outlets as seen in the role of political influencers. The political opinions of their followers can be influenced solely and unipolarly by these opinion leaders. Recent research has also shed light on how algorithm personalization also function as gate-keeping agents along with opinion leaders, further establishing the uniocular assimilation of information (Soffer, O., 2021). Affective intelligence theory postulates that people's information processing and emotions are what fuel political divisiveness. It makes the argument that people often filter information through their emotions and preconceived notions, which results in exposing them only to information that confirms their opinions. This serves to strengthen and deepen polarization (Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M., 2000). Along the same lines, the cognitive dissonance theory is one in which people may feel uncomfortable psychologically when they come across content on social media that challenges their preconceived notions. This is known as cognitive dissonance. To lessen the dissonance, they could either dismiss the contradicting facts or change their beliefs. This theory explains how users of social media may create or modify their beliefs in response to conflicting ideas (Acharya, A., Blackwell, M., & Sen, M., 2018). In response to that, people establish online networks based on shared identities and views by connecting with like-minded people on

social media. According to social identity theory, people get a sense of self-worth and belonging from the groups they are a part of. This might result in the reinforcing of group ideas on social media and a resistance to considering different points of view (Trepte, S., 2013).

The present research question tries to understand these effects and how they influence the political attitudes, perceptions, and views of the youth of India and tries to fill the gap in the research literature regarding the same in the Indian context. This paper will focus on studying the various ways in which social media has played a role in the shaping of political attitudes, views, and beliefs of youth in India. It will also aim to understand if and how social media has propagated the creation of echo chambers and polarisation in Indian youth and how those have had reinforcing effects on the population. It has been conducted to give us an insight into the various processes that underlie the influence and outcomes of social media as one of the sole advocates of information gain and understanding among them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been numerous studies on the impact of social media and politics in the Western context but limited ones in India. India is one of the countries with the highest number of adolescents and young adults in the world. This points to the increasing power of social media as it is a major medium of communication and expression of ideas among the youth of our country.

The paper written by Jonathan Cohen et al., in 2008, highlights the theoretical and empirical basis for the relationship between politicians' perceptions of media power and their behaviour in response to media coverage. Results show that presumed media influence on the public positively affected media motivation and effort. ("The Influence of Presumed Media Influence in Politics", n.d.).

The study by Westerwick, A. D., & Meng, J., conducted in 2014, examined 43 research papers, selected with the process of a systemic review, showed that there is selective exposure, with people choosing politically compatible information over politically incompatible information more frequently. Furthermore, the research indicates that this impact is larger for people with stronger political opinions. It has been found that selective exposure may lead to increased political polarisation and decreased political involvement, which are both detrimental to political dialogue.

Another study by Stromer-Galley and colleagues in 2014 evaluated social media usage trends and their associations with political engagement in three developed democracies. It was found that social media usage is positively associated with political engagement among young people in developed democracies. The study also discovers that social media use is favourably related to political participation, notably in France and the United Kingdom. The authors discussed that social media might exacerbate already-existing disparities, particularly if technology access and digital literacy are unequally distributed.

The study "The Truth in a Bubble: The End of Audience Democracy and the Rise of Bubble Democracy" by Zlatko Šabič and Aljaž Pengov Bitenc done in 2019 examines the impact of technological improvements and the rise of social media on democratic processes. The authors suggest that the conventional paradigm of audience democracy, in which voters are exposed to multiple opinions and may make educated judgements is being replaced by a new

model, which is named bubble democracy in which individuals are only exposed to information and viewpoints that coincide with their pre-existing convictions, which produces "echo chambers" and makes effective political discussions impossible. The article also looks at how this transition affects the media, political parties, and the people's involvement.

Previous studies have shown that political echo chambers on social media can contribute to polarization and hinder healthy exchanges. A paper published in 2021 written by authors Emily Kubin and Christian von Sikorski examines how social media platforms contribute to political polarization by analyzing online political discussions. They highlight the unique features of social media platforms, including algorithmic amplification, filter bubbles, and echo chambers, that can reinforce existing political beliefs and ideologies, and limit exposure to opposing views.

Hence as observed there is a lack of studies understanding the impact of social Media on the perception of political discourses and the formation of echo chambers. In conclusion, to fill out these research gaps, it is important to explore this research.

METHODOLOGY

Aim
To understand the impact of social media on the formation of echo chambers in political ideology among the youth of India.

Objectives
1. To find out if social media affects political ideologies among the youth in India.
2. To investigate how people utilize social media to engage in political discourses and engage with people with similar or opposing political views.
3. To explore how social media affects the development of echo chambers and the polarisation of political ideologies.

Qualitative Research Approach
The overall approach of the study is a qualitative research method. While existing quantitative studies have shed light on the prevalence of echo chambers and the content distribution algorithms within social media platforms, they often fall short of capturing the intricate and nuanced experiences of individuals within these echo chambers. The subjective nature of these experiences calls for an in-depth exploration that goes beyond numbers and statistics. Therefore, a qualitative research approach is not only appropriate but also essential to uncover the underlying motivations, perceptions, and emotions that drive the formation and sustenance of echo chambers among the youth in India.

Trustworthiness
To assure credibility in our study used investigator and theoretical triangulation. It involves the participation of researchers in the same study to provide multiple observations and conclusions and promote the use of multiple theories or hypotheses when examining a situation or phenomenon (Carter, N., et al., 2014). To establish the dependability of the study we designed proper data collection methods and procedures and we ensured that they were properly documented after analysis. All researchers involved in this study checked and rechecked the analysis and transcripts to ensure that the findings were not repeated. All

personal biases were unpacked in the write-up to ensure reflexivity and confirmability of the study.

Research design
The present study followed qualitative research methods as the study aimed to understand the perceptions and beliefs of the participants. The research followed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Following this, a structured interview was conducted to collect data on the experience of the participants with social media and its influence on their perception of political discourses. The interviews were taken offline. The interviews were transcribed in English language and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Sample
The target population of this study was the active youth of our country who use social media to engage in political discourses and discussions or to express opinions. This study included conducting in-depth interviews with 10 individuals aged 18-25 years who were actively using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, and Instagram to effectively consume or share political opinions or ideologies until data saturation was reached. This age group was chosen because they are more likely to use social media as a primary source of information and have a pivotal impact on the nation's present and future political interests. Users of YouTube, Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, and Instagram were chosen because these are the most popular social media platforms and have become a solid platform for the dissemination of political information, with many political figures and organizations using it as one of their primary means of communication with the young voters of the country (Paruthi, M., Mendiratta, P., & Gupta, G., 2022).

Tool
The interview schedule was drafted and reviewed by the guide. The interview schedule is attached below in the appendix of the report. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain information about the political opinions and social media usage of the participants.

Procedure
Participants were selected based on adherence to the inclusion criteria followed by the conduction of semi-structured interviews with each of them with the help of the interview schedule drafted for the study. This was followed by the analysis of the data which was done using thematic analysis which was done manually after the translation and coding of the raw data.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Theme 1- Polarisation

Themes	Description
Polarisation	It refers to the divergence of political ideologies into extremes. It results in the formation of division between people due to the formation of polar opposite opinions.
Sub-themes	Descriptions and Citations
Influence of social media on Political Polarization	This theme explores how social media platforms can contribute to the polarization of political opinions and beliefs. Participant 3 accounts for "creating differences among people's opinions and everything." She also mentions "social media through other

	happenings of the country that either support the leftist parties or the rightist parties." Participant 5 also mentions that "something this powerful involves people with two different ideologies have a whole other means of destroying each other's lives." Participant 10 mentions that "Groupism on social media can lead to differing opinions on important issues".
Formation of Online Communities with Diverse Views	This theme examines the role of online communities in shaping and reinforcing polarized ideologies and opinions. Participant 1 mentions "It has contributed to the polarization of opinions, creating divisions among people with different political beliefs." Participant 5 makes an account that "Social media fosters a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals and can bring people with differing ideologies together".
Influence of Algorithms	It focuses on how algorithms and online groups can either unite like-minded individuals for a common cause or create divisions among different groups, potentially leading to polarization. Participant 6 mentions that "algorithms play a significant role, and we all have our perceptions. It's particularly easy to influence young people, even teenagers, who may not have strong opinions of their own." Participant 3 also talks about how algorithms influence the news we are fed. "So they compress information without providing the actual nuance that is required to understand the topic much more the problem is that these kinds of videos are being like, there is also the problem of the algorithm which is there".
Mixed Impact of Groupism on Social Media	This theme considers the various effects of groupism on social media, including the potential for differing opinions and polarization. Participant 2 talks about how "Misleading headlines have the power to sway opinions and fuel support for causes without a solid understanding of the facts. This distortion can create divisions, pushing people to adopt extreme positions without considering the grey areas in complex issues. It's a challenge to navigate the gradient of opinions and encourage more informed, balanced discourse, as knee-jerk reactions based on incomplete information often led to polarization and hinder constructive dialogue." Participant 7 takes a more positive stance by mentioning "social media fosters the formation of communities and groups with common interests, which can lead to meaningful and beneficial actions for a larger cause or shared goal." He focuses on the fact that it can also create groups for working towards a social cause.

Table No. 2 Theme 2- Echo Chambers

Theme	Description
Echo Chamber	Echo chambers are a phenomenon where individuals are exposed only to information and opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of confirmation bias. The participants in the study also talk about the formation of echo chambers in social media.
Sub - Themes	Descriptions and Citation

Manipulation of Public Perception During Elections	This is about how social media influences swaying the youth and reinforcing beliefs and ideologies through manipulation. Participant 6 talks "While it is a powerful tool for spreading information, it can also be used for manipulation. Factors like colour psychology, advertising, slogans, and presentation significantly influence people to become followers or voters. So, even though social media can inform, it can also be biased and manipulative, using psychological tools to sway opinions." Participant 10 also mentions "Social media's influence on political engagement is seen as a manipulative game, causing a lack of faith in the government and diminishing interest in elections among the younger generation".
Formation of Online Communities with Diverse Views	This theme examines the role of online communities in shaping and reinforcing polarized ideologies and opinions. Participant 1 mentions "It has contributed to the polarization of opinions, creating divisions among people with different political beliefs." Participant 5 makes an account that "Social media fosters a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals and can bring people with differing ideologies together".
Group Formation	This talks about how there is the formation of different groups through social media that most of the time reinforces our beliefs and ideologies. Participant 10 talks about the formation of groups that reinforce our beliefs. "Groupism on social media can lead to differing opinions on important issues, often influenced by privilege and a lack of awareness of the realities faced by marginalized groups." Participant 6 said that "social media can easily foster the formation of cult-like groups, but it can also support groups working towards a specific cause or be self-sustaining and self-helping. In the context of politics, social media can be used for both uniting or dividing people".

Table No. 3 Theme 3- Influence of Social Media on Political Perception

Theme	Description
Influence of social media on Political Perception	It talks about understanding the impact of social media on forming political perceptions. Social media has transformed the way people communicate, access information, and engage in political discussions, and it has become an influential tool in shaping public opinion and political discourse
Sub-themes	**Description and Citations**
Authenticity/Reliability of information	This theme talks about the authenticity and reliability of the information delivered through social media. The information sometimes can be manipulated and adultered. Participant 2 mentions that "they can all talk about their ideologies, and sometimes it's very easy to fall into a trap where you get brainwashed by certain ideology". Participant 10 points out that "Politicians and political parties use social media to project a positive image, making it challenging to see their shortcomings and the potential discrepancy between their online image and real-life actions, influencing public perception".

Political awareness and engagement	It discusses the impact of social media in bringing political awareness and how it influences the youth to engage in political discourses. Participant 1 says "I hold the belief that social media can have a negative impact because the portrayal of news and political content is often adulterated and not always representative of the actual views and voices of politicians or political parties. Instead, it tends to reflect the perspectives and beliefs of the page administrators, which can be misleading". Participant 8 mentions that "they often focus on their most assertive and uncompromising beliefs, which may not necessarily align with the perspectives of younger audiences. As a result, my views are somewhat negatively influenced by the content I encounter".
Use of social media in the election process	Social media is a means of propagating various political parties by employing various strategies. Participant 5 mentions that "They employ various tactics such as ads and memes to capture the attention of viewers, making social media a pivotal tool in their campaign strategies." Participant 10 points out that "Politicians and political parties use social media to project a positive image, making it challenging to see their shortcomings and the potential discrepancy between their online image and real-life actions, influencing public perception".
Comparison to other sources of information	In comparison to other modes of accessing news such as traditional ways and familial influences, social media has a higher impact on news consumption by the youth in India. Participant 2 talks "But social media is some place wherein you can choose your company or choose where you want to participate". According to Participant 5, "Social media and digital news platforms are rendering traditional media obsolete for younger generations, and family influences can significantly shape an individual's political opinions, impacting their ability to express their views and their choice of political affiliations".

Table No. 4 Theme 4- Strategies for Effective Use of Social Media to Increase Awareness and Participation

Theme	Description
Strategies for Effective Use of social media to Increase Awareness and Participation	This theme focuses on the strategies that could be employed to use social media as a platform to have more stimulative discussions and increase awareness and participation of youth in political discourses.
Sub-themes	Description and Citations
Control of Content Generated	It talks about the importance of controlling the content that is depicted on social media platforms and how content should be restricted to prevent false information. Participant 4 discusses how to control the content generated and displayed on social media platforms, "A lot of things that should be controlled. The quality check of this content should be done by neutral people". He also says "I would say that social media can improve vastly

	if they restrict certain sorts of content, certain sorts of speech, and certain words to be used". Participant 7 also says "For anything to happen, there should be strict laws. There should be some strict measures that are preventing them from doing that". According to Participant 8, the content should be checked thoroughly "I believe that one of the main things that can be done before putting out any information concerning political agenda or propaganda is probably cross-checking or running a background".
Misleading/Manipulative advertisements	Participant 4 mentions that "You'd still remember that washing power nirma ad, do something like that for your state elections for your Central Elections for your general election, stuff like that". According to Participant 3, "The problem with social media is that the marketing strategy which they employ is based on advertising. So, I think we should be introducing paid social media platforms, something that does not use the ad model of revenue".
Reliable Channels	Participant 3 mentions "And I think we should be doing away with these sorts of addictive algorithms which can sway people to a particular part of the political spectrum and barring them from acquiring information about the other side of the issue". As mentioned by participant 6, it is important to recheck the news from other reliable sources to have a clearer perspective "My personal views aren't solely shaped by social media; instead, I consider it a tool for understanding diverse perspectives. I construct my views by gathering information from multiple sources, avoiding reliance on a single platform like social media".

The data collected during the study gives rise to four prominent themes: polarization. Formation of echo chambers, the influence of social media on political perception, and strategies for effective use of social media to increase awareness and participation. Polarization is when there are two different contrasting beliefs or opinions among a group of people. We have found that this concept is a prevailing theme. Different reasons were found to be the reason for this, like social media algorithms, and forming an online community and groups. The first one of these is the influence of social media on political polarization. This sub-theme explores how social media platforms can contribute to the polarization of political opinions and beliefs. It was a common ideology shared by the participants that social media drives people and that those who are vulnerable are driven toward extreme beliefs being highly influential and the vulnerability of the individuals being a factor. Participants agree that social media contributes to the increased polarization of opinions, particularly along leftist and rightist political ideologies, and state that it amplifies events or issues aligned with these ideologies, exacerbating divisions among people, and widening the political divide. This influence does not always come from political parties directly but is a result of social dynamics and the magnifying effect of social media. Another sub-theme found was the formation of online communities with diverse views. This theme examines the role of online communities in shaping and reinforcing polarized ideologies and opinions. Participants mention that social media has transformed the way we build and engage with groups, whether they're physical gatherings or online communities. It has enabled the

formation of informed and influential communities where diverse ideas and opinions can flourish. This shift goes beyond mere conformity to popular sentiment, fostering meaningful discussions and substantial impacts instead of just echoing the prevailing narrative. The majority of the participants agree that social media connects people with shared interests and opposing views, fostering online communities that drive meaningful actions, even amid significant events, including within political ideologies. The sub-theme of the influence of algorithms and cult-like groups on opinions was also found. It focuses on how algorithms and online groups can either unite like-minded individuals for a common cause or create divisions among different groups, potentially leading to polarization. Participants have mentioned that social media can cultivate cult-like groups or support self-sustaining, cause-driven communities and that in politics, it can divide or unite, a potent tool for both scenarios. Most of the participants mentioned that social media's algorithms shape opinions by recommending content based on user engagement. Consciously limiting interactions helps control influence, but algorithms can still inflate minor issues into major controversies, contributing to polarization. The perception of a mixed impact of groupism on social media was also found. This sub-theme considers the various effects of groups on social media, including the potential for differing opinions and polarization. Participants mention that groups on social media can result in divergent opinions, often influenced by privilege and a lack of awareness about the challenges faced by marginalized groups on important issues. Participants also mention that social media cultivates communities around shared interests, driving meaningful actions across various contexts, including within political ideologies, for common causes and shared goals.

Echo Chambers was another prominent theme found among the answers of the participants. Participants in the discussion emphasized the significance of echo chambers as a dominant feature of social media. These echo chambers, often shaped by algorithms, have a substantial influence on public perception and interaction, particularly during election seasons. Echo chambers, driven by algorithms, play a central role in shaping public perception and interaction during election seasons on social media. These chambers are not only manipulated by political parties but also foster group formation, unite and divide individuals, and reinforce existing ideologies. Understanding the dynamics of echo chambers is crucial in comprehending the impact of social media on public opinion and the formation of beliefs. Manipulation of public perception during elections was one such sub-theme found. Within these echo chambers, participants observed that political parties skillfully manipulate public perception, especially during election seasons. These parties are keenly aware of the sway of social media, particularly among young, politically neutral demographics. To capitalize on this, they employ an array of strategies, including the use of color psychology and the dissemination of humorous content like memes, aiming to target and influence the youth. However, a downside to this approach is that it often leads to the spread of one-sided or biased information through social media, effectively influencing voter decisions. Group formation is another such sub-theme in which participants noted how the presence of echo chambers also significantly encourages the formation of distinct groups with shared ideologies. Participants also noted how individuals effortlessly come together online, rallying around specific content or discussions, further reinforcing their beliefs. Social media platforms serve as catalysts for the swift and robust creation of these ideological groups, often uniting like-minded people from different parts of the world. Also emerged a sub-theme of uniting and dividing through social media. Echo chambers, participants believed, have the power to both unite and divide individuals on social media platforms. They can create a sense of community among like-minded individuals, fostering

constructive discussions and actions but they can also lead to divisions and extremism. This results in dichotomies and polarized opinions on various topics. The algorithms that drive content recommendation are significant contributors to the formation of these radicalized perspectives, affecting public perception and the shaping of individual ideologies. Apart from this, reinforcing existing ideologies also emerged as a sub-theme. Participants observed that echo chambers intensify the reinforcement of existing ideologies. Content repetition and algorithm-driven customization serve to strengthen individuals' pre-existing beliefs, leading to an environment where diverse perspectives are rarely considered. The consequence is an echo chamber that perpetuates and isolates individuals in their own ideological bubbles, limiting open dialogue and critical thinking.

The influence of social media on political perception was another theme that was identified. Authenticity/reliability of information. From the interviews, we can infer that though social media has significantly influenced historical and current events, providing access to information about political figures and incidents, most of the participants believe that its reliability and accuracy can be questionable due to potential misinformation. Social media's influence on today's youth is significant, as traditional news channels face allegations of political party influence, highlighting the need for critical evaluation. Political awareness and engagement were recognized by most of the participants and they indicate that social media has played a significant role in the awareness of various political and social issues. This has been noted to have both a positive and a negative influence with the positive one being that people have the opportunity to avail a plethora of information at a moment's notice along with various viewpoints and opinions. This has also been seen as a negative trend as the reliability of the information has been questioned. Apart from this, participants have also mentioned how social media is preventing people from actually engaging in the election process and promoting a lack of action by giving a sense of satisfaction by making users think they are making a difference by sharing stories or giving out opinions as they might feel obligated to have an opinion even without having all the facts intact. Use in the election processes has been noticed by participants and they mentioned that social media has played a role in manipulating public perception during election campaigns, particularly through the spread of misinformation. Social media can potentially educate the public about voting benefits and the voting process, but it also raises concerns about manipulation and agenda-setting. Factors like color psychology, advertising, slogans, and presentation can influence opinions and influence followers. Social media can be both informative and manipulative, causing a lack of faith in the government and diminishing interest in elections among the younger generation. Despite its potential, social media's influence on political engagement is seen as a double-edged sword. Participants spoke about different problems existing in India where their perception is influenced by social media. One common problem that was mentioned by most of the participants is the LGBTQIA+ community issue. It broadens people's mentalities and offers a window into popular opinions, allowing individuals to reconsider their perspectives, social media plays a vital role in shaping perceptions and fostering discussions on important issues, such as the Supreme Court's decision not to legalize LGBT marriage. Most of them mentioned that perception of the problem is widely influenced by the opinions of the content providers in media like influencers, etc. Participant 9 also mentions that social media propagators mix their perceptions into giving out information. There was also a comparison of various media outlets used to obtain political information. Most of the participants watch news regularly, including local, national, and international news. Despite the prevalence of social media, some of them still prefer traditional TV news channels for their comprehensive and in-depth

understanding of current events. Traditional media in India often deviated from its purpose of truth dissemination, with a disproportionate focus on religious and sensational topics. Social media and digital news platforms are rendering traditional media obsolete for younger generations, and family influences can significantly shape an individual's political opinions. Immediacy and directness of information on social media, as it allows for quick, to-the-point information and avoids legitimate information through them. Balancing information from various sources and cross-referencing with offline news and trusted individuals helps mitigate the impact of potentially unreliable information on social media, enabling a more informed perspective.

The theme strategies for effective use of social media to increase awareness and participation included quality check/control of content. Participants suggest that social media platforms should have better quality control of content by having neutral people check the accuracy of the information being put out. This would help prevent the spread of false information, which can negatively impact political awareness and participation. Participants also believe that for anything to happen, there should be strict laws. There should be some strict measures that are preventing them from doing that. Reliable channels and pages are formal and accurate pages on social media that portray correct information and everything. By engaging with these pages, individuals can participate in the political process in a passive manner. misleading/manipulative advertisements are mentioned and it is noted that the marketing strategy employed by social media platforms is based on advertising, which can be problematic. Participants also suggest introducing paid social media platforms that do not use the ad model of revenue. Additionally, they suggest doing away with addictive algorithms that can sway people to a particular part of the political spectrum and prevent them from acquiring information about the other side of the issue, participants also suggest that social media platforms restrict certain content, speech, and words to be used, but in a way that is not discriminatory. This would help ensure that social media is used in a more informed and less manipulative way.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, people have an abstract idea about echo chambers and strongly believe that social media polarizes people and has negative effects on them. Most participants are unaware of the consequences of the internal dynamics of echo chambers, which lead to seeing things only from one point of view leading to the unipolarity of ideas among people in them. The study provides insights on how to engage with the youth through social media and how to address the challenges and risks associated with it, which can help policymakers moderate their engagement in social causes. This could help policymakers develop effective strategies to engage with the youth and promote political participation among them. Further studies could investigate various other factors that influence political perception as well as conduct research with objective measures to gain a deeper understanding of participants' online political behaviour.

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Conflict of Interest

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