# Social Media: Perspectives threat and opportunities in Indian Democracy

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**ABSTRACT** *Most analysis about social networking tends to focus on the phenomenon's utopian qualities, but rarely take the dystopian view which focuses on its negative side effects on society.Eventually, A more critical view holds that social media in fact works more against democracy rather than for it.*

*The idealists argues that social media is "Democracy In Action", giving voice to millions and breaking down traditional information distribution channels and power structures. Perhaps, the fact it may not be true. Social Media giving every citizen a right to speak out. At the same time, it is threatening with spreading anti-national sentiments which are real threat to Indian Democracy.*

*Nevertheless, as social media continues to mature, we must make a distinction—there is a difference between being democratic and aiding in democracy. Social media has proved a superb aide on countless occasions, but how democratic are the twitter feeds really?*

*In his highly respected examination of Internet structure, The Myth of Digital Democracy (2009), political scientist Matthew Hindman challenges traditional notions of open Internet communications. His findings run contrary to what we would like to believe: a few, large forces dominate communication trends on the Internet. Moreover, the Internet has produced an "echo chamber" effect, in which sites only link and discuss with those that purport similar viewpoints.*

*The echo chamber poses a distinct threat to the democratic potential of social media. Apparently, The very essence of democracy is a balanced consideration of multiple viewpoints, coalescing into an informed decision. However, presently the structure of the Internet does not lend well to this desired balance. Many, including Hindman himself, have attributed today's harsh partisan environment to an increasingly polarized information set. Dana Radcliffe of Cornell University recently discussed this "Grim Irony," that increased communicative ability can limit democracy. In the eyes of Radcliffe, effective use of social media organizes a bombardment of similar, non-diverse messages. The result: a public more heavily informed than ever, but only by one side of a specific issue.*

## Introduction

Democracy in general terms understood to be a form of government which is subject to popular sovereignty. It is especially a rule by people which is in contrast to monarchies or aristocracies. Important aspect of democratic system is freedom of expression and the space that is provided to views from different sections of society. A democratic system can run to its utmost potential when there is wide participation on the part the general mass which is not possible without people getting informed about various issues.

Social Media is a term refers to variety of web based platforms, applications and technologies that enable people to socially interact with one another online. Some examples of social media sites and applications include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Digg, blogs and other sites that have content based on user participation and user generated content. Social media differ from traditional media in many ways, including quality, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. There are many effects that stem from internet usage. According to Nielsen, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site.

## India and Social Media penetration

The number of social media users are around 125 million in India in 2013. It is bigger than the population of any state. Facebook is the leading website accessed by 96 per cent of all social media users and it is most used to connect with friends, publishing content and searching contacts. LinkedIn, Twitter, Orkut, BharatStudent.com, Zedge. net, Ibibo.com, hi5.com, Shtyle.fm, Indyarocks, Fropper. com and Myspace.com are followed. Twitter has 15 million and LinkedIn has 45 million users in India. The medium is increasingly used by political institutions and 2-5 per cent of election budgets are estimated to be spent on social media initiatives. Corporate houses are also hurrying to tap this huge potential, especially consisting of youth. Political parties of persons are also willing to gain from these new communication technologies, which are having huge potential to reach in very less time and to very larger audience. But cultural barriers, lack of advanced technologies or fear of reprisals by political figures may limit the willingness and ability of people to express themselves, even when social media services are available locally. Where the world does seem to express itself politically with more openness is on social media websites that are more oriented toward global markets. Youtube, the social media video service has videos focusing on politics uploaded by its members from nations all around the world.

Social media are playing an important new role in Indian democracy. A social media campaign by the Electoral Commission drew record levels of voter registration and turnout in elections held in four Indian states, including the capital, New Delhi, in November and December 2013.

## Social Media- a threat

Social media may be subject to significant abuse. Some politicians have been accused of boosting their apparent popularity on social media with legions of followers who

don't exist and of using social media to smear their opponents. Worse, social media have been used to fan violence against religious and ethnic groups; the dissemination of a fraudulent video may have helped spark deadly clashes between Hindus and Muslims in the city of Muzaffarnagar in September 2013.

In November 2012, two women were arrested after posting a comment on Facebook that angered politicians in Mumbai. Journalists have had their Twitter accounts disabled and cartoonists whose works poke fun at officials have had their social media accounts closed.

Threatening text messages sent in bulk were the main vehicle of the insidious rumours that have swirled around in the Bangalore which resulted in mass exodus of north-eastern people in August 2012.

On May 14, 2013 a court in the town of Padmarao Nagar in the Prakasam District, state of Andhra Pradesh, sentenced lawyer Jaya Vindhayala, the state general secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), to 12 days in judicial custody for posting comments on her Facebook account that criticised a local governor and a Congress Member of the Legislative Assembly.

A man was arrested in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, for making communal and inflammatory comments on Facebook about Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Telecom Minister Kapil Sibal and Samajwadi Party Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Sanjay Chowdhary, a civil engineer and resident of Dayalbagh, an Agra suburb, was arrested on Monday, Feb. 4, 2013 and his laptop, a sim card and a data card were also seized. Inflammatory comments and posts on Chowdhary's Facebook wall.

The above mentioned are some of he examples which considered as defamatory and followed by legal action. Here we find a thin line between the freedom of expression and defamatory behavior. Sometimes what one considered as freedom of expression may be defamatory for other.

Social media allow people to synchronize beliefs and coordinate actions in a way and on a scale not previously possible. Social media pose a unique set of problems for abusive hierarchical power structures, and that increasingly it will be harder to both censor these technologies in an effort to resist change and participate in the global economy.

Social media gives communicative freedom. It is difficult for outsiders to understand the local conditions of dissent. External support runs the risk of tainting even peaceful opposition as being directed by foreign elements. Dissidents can be exposed by the unintended effects of novel tools.

While social media might be good at yielding uprisings, is it good at producing a stable democratic power structure?

A social movement which empowered by the use of social media actually hinders the formation of stable power structures. It isn't really a matter of does democracy produce stability, rather a question of whether or not social media enables the construction of a democracy, or slightly different even if revolutions which utilize social media perhaps yield a different form of governance and power distribution. It is entirely possible that one could get an unstable democracy.

While these technologies might be very effective at altering power dynamics or accelerating social unrest, long lasting social stability is by no means a given. One can see how this fear is warranted when we look at the characterization of the Egypt revolution as leaderless, or people led. During the early days of the Egyptian revolution ElBaredi returns to Egypt and tries unsuccessfully to instill himself as the leader of the movement. This is not to suggest that there were not leaders of the revolution, but rather there were not leaders in place as we typically recognize them. This became even more clear when the regime wanted to try and negotiate with the protestors-there was no leader with whom to negotiate.

This may be best suited example for how social media can mislead a movement or even a democratical setup. They might be really good in the short term, but the attributes which make social media powerful in the short term, might also be a hindrance in the long term, not so good at long lasting stability.

The speed and organizational structure of social media probably lends itself to being easily used as a force for anti-power, an easy way to organize a massive unrest. Social media might be particularly useful for organizing and coordinating people to resist power, acting as a destabilizing force, the very factors that make it so useful in this regard might make it less useful, indeed counterproductive democratic organization.

**Social Media- an opportunity to strengthen democracy**
On January 17, 2001, during the impeachment trial of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, loyalists in the Philippine Congress voted to set aside key evidence against him. Less than two hours after the decision was announced, thousands of Filipinos, angry that their corrupt president might be let off the hook, converged on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a major crossroads in Manila. The protest was arranged, in part, by forwarded text messages reading, "Go 2 EDSA. Wear blk." The crowd quickly swelled, and in the next few days, over a million people arrived, choking traffic in downtown Manila.

The public's ability to coordinate such a massive and rapid response -- close to seven million text messages were sent that week -- so alarmed the country's legislators that they reversed course and allowed the evidence to be presented. Estrada's fate was sealed; by January 20, he was gone. The event marked the first time that social media had helped force out a national leader. Estrada himself blamed "the text-messaging generation" for his downfall.

Since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the world's networked population has grown from the low millions to the low billions. Over the same period, social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide, involving many actors -- regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organizations, telecommunications firms, software providers, governments.

As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action. The Philippine strategy has been adopted many times since. In some cases, the pro-

testers ultimately succeeded, as in Spain in 2004, when demonstrations organized by text messaging led to the quick ouster of Spanish

Despite this mixed record, social media have become co-ordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements, just as most of the world's authoritarian governments are trying to limit access to it.

New media conducive to fostering participation can indeed increase the freedoms just as the printing press, the postal service, the telegraph, and the telephone did before. One complaint about the idea of new media as a political force is that most people simply use these tools for commerce, social life, but this is common to all forms of media.

The more promising way to think about social media is as long-term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere. According to this conception, positive changes in the life of a country, including pro-democratic regime change, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere.

The idea that media, from the Voice of America to samizdat, play a supporting role in social change by strengthening the public sphere echoes the historical role of the printing press. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas argued in his 1962 book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the printing press helped democratize Europe by providing space for discussion and agreement among politically engaged citizens, often before the state had fully democratized, an argument extended by later scholars, such as Asa Briggs, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Paul Starr.

The younger generation had practice in organizing and utilizing social media tools that in the long term it might actually lead to greater participation and a healthier public sphere.

Political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and densely connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public. In a famous study of political opinion after the 1948 U.S. presidential election, the sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld discovered that mass media alone do not change people's minds; instead, there is a two-step process. Opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends,

family members, and colleagues. It is in this second, social step that political opinions are formed. This is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference. As with the printing press, the Internet spreads not just media consumption but media production as well -- it allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views.

Disciplined and coordinated groups, whether businesses or governments, have always had an advantage over undisciplined ones: they have an easier time engaging in collective action because they have an orderly way of directing the action of their members. Social media can compensate for the disadvantages of undisciplined groups by reducing the costs of coordination.

The looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns that were previously reserved for formal organizations. For political movements, one of the main forms of coordination is "shared awareness," the ability of each member of a group to not only understand the situation at hand but also understand that everyone else does, too. Social media increase shared awareness by propagating messages through social networks.

The Chinese anticorruption protests that broke out in the aftermath of the devastating May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan are another example of such ad hoc synchronization. The protesters were parents, particularly mothers, who had lost their only children in the collapse of shoddily built schools, the result of collusion between construction firms and the local government. Before the earthquake, corruption in the country's construction industry was an open secret. But when the schools collapsed, citizens began sharing documentation of the damage and of their protests through social media tools.

### Conclusion
In India media has responsibility which is deeply associated with the socio economic conditions. Perhaps, The present scenario and the expected future growth of social media is seems to be definitely taking this responsibility. Apparently, we cannot ignore the strength of social media. It is imperative to properly use the power and reach of social media or guide towards proper use of social media. Even social media organizations should be monitored. Eventually, integrity and ethical standards are not sacrificed. Self regulation among the users of social media should be followed to stop anomalies whenever they occur.

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