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## Media Literacy as a Tool for Social Change: Examining the Influence of Social Media on Youth Perspective

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### Abstract

Social media has been evolved into a powerful tool that mitigates and addresses variety of social causes in today's digital era. People are re-defining communication due to new developments in the media platforms. The study investigates the possible use of social media in solving social problems in our society. The aim of the study is to establish how social changes, mobilizing communities, and awareness creation can be done through the use of social media sites. The paper analyzes the influence of social media on the role of education in our society and how there is propagation of information and enhancement of the awareness and understanding of the people regarding the causes that are important. The paper examines the various forms of social capital in its positive association in both mobilization and community organization whereby it is capable of establishing and constructing online communities that generate action among people. The study uncovers the impact of social media in policy and legislative change as an analysis of how online activism has the potential to build and rebuild political agendas. It also recognizes the weaknesses and traps of social media as a tool of social change including misinformation, creation of echo chambers, filter bubble, and the digital divide. Lastly, research explores the theoretical concepts that govern the role of social media sites in social change, such as network theory and social capital theory, in order to achieve a clear insight into its dynamics. The research has come on the basis of primary and secondary data both. Primary data would be gathered through survey questionnaire that will consist of both close and open ended questions. Secondary data has been collected by government reports and records, Newspapers and magazines, websites and previous researches. The nature of the research is quantitative and qualitative both. The nature of the study is descriptive and quantitative; the respondents' sample size was 100. The study ends with recommendations for ensuring maximum effectiveness of social media for advocacy purposes, stressing digital literacy, participatory inclusivity, and also measures to address disinformation.

**Keywords:** social media, social change, mobilization, awareness, education, community building.

### 1. Introduction

Social media has brought out such a transition from previous practices in the way that people communicate or relate with their group or community, exchanging information, and assembling to act together. Within the last decade, social media, including Meta, Instagram, and Twitter, have become an integral part of people's daily lives and inform education, community building, political activism, and policy change. Social media reshapes traditional channels of operation of communication into spaces of participation and engagement into the societal discourse.

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**Impact on the Societal Change:** The social media can be profound and multidimensional in its influence because the social media can spread information rapidly. This way, users can, in real time, share and access news and opinions. In this way, users can, through social media, have ideas in real time, which can contribute to societal change (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This immediacy has been responsible for the most prominent issues at hand, such as the Arab Spring, where social media intervened to organize protests and provide information during government censorship (Howard, Hussain, 2011). This also applies to movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, which through social media, amplify voices, mobilize supporters, and result in change by altering the strength of such platforms, in this case, to be able to influence social justice initiatives (Jackson et al., 2020).

Social media has created new avenues for learning and collaboration across geographic boundaries that connect learners around the world, according to Greenhow and Lewin (Greenhow, Lewin, 2016). Learning institutions and instructors use social media to involve students, share resources and create an interactive environment for learning, thereby heightening the learning experience.

Additionally, social media has significantly transformed political sceneries by providing a forum for political conversation and facilitating direct communication between politicians and the people (Loader, Mercea, 2011). Information is also democratized since the voices of marginalized members can be part of and included in more representative ways in political activity.

Nonetheless, social media has its challenges in its roles concerning change in society. Some of the critical issues that challenge the positive potential of social media includes misinformation, digital privacy, and the digital divide (Allcott, Gentzkow, 2017; Van, Dijk, 2012). Nevertheless, it is evident that social media is a transformative influencer for society, and knowledge about the present social dynamics cannot be fully understood without this area of study.

## **2. Materials and methods**

Research has used a mixed-method approach which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies in order to delve into the research problem from all aspects. The research is mainly explorative.

Primary data were gathered through using survey questionnaires targeted at users of social media platforms, which include Facebook (Meta), Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. The sample population is people aged 18 to 40 residing in the Delhi NCR region.

To support the primary data, related secondary data were collected from government reports, news reports, magazines, websites, and some existing surveys. This will ensure a robust analysis through the use of firsthand experiences and literature in hand, thus making it comprehensive on the subject matter.

For quantitative research, a stratified random sampling has been used to recruit 80 participants from diverse demographic backgrounds from youth of Delhi NCR (aged 18-40). And for qualitative research, content from previous reports, articles, newspapers, websites and research papers has been gathered.

## **3. Discussion**

Rapidly growing usage of social media platforms has indeed changed societies from place to place extensively with regard to mobilization, communication and the actual changes in society. Social media has been deeply explored by numerous researchers in terms of how they affect the structure of the society in one way or another, whether in terms of the role they play in education and communal development or merely observing the changes in policies, issues surrounding them and many others. The literature review integrates some of the main findings of existing studies to provide a general and broad insight on the role of social media in bringing about change in the society.

The cooperation and learning are some of the new forms of education that have been transformed by social media. As it can be seen, social media platforms have been used to play a crucial role in knowledge exchange, facilitating digital literacy, and augmenting student engagement (Greenhow, Lewin, 2016). Various studies show that social media platforms including Facebook (Meta) and Twitter help teachers' professional development and process of informal learning (Manca, Ranieri, 2016). Concerns include the division of the digital age, digital diversion, and information validity (Kirschner, Karpinski, 2010).

The widespread use of social media sites like Facebook (Meta), Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram in education and gaining information has been developed. According to research, such social media platforms help with academic discussions; knowledge sharing, socializing and team work (Manca, Ranieri, 2016). On the other side, students can also take part in academic discussions beyond the conventional classroom setting, access educational content, and participate in online learning communities thanks to social media (Tess, 2013).

Social media platforms have been linked to increased engagement of students in educational activities. As per the research of (Junco et al., 2011), students who used Twitter for academic discussions performed better academically and were more involved. Collective or combined learning is promoted by online forums and interactive educational activities on apps like Telegram and WhatsApp (Al-Rahmi et al., 2014).

Furthermore, social media makes it possible for students to participate in virtual study groups, follow educational and informative pages or channels, and communicate with teachers outside of scheduled class times, allowing for personalized experiences in learning (Veletsianos, Navarrete, 2012).

Social media has privilege, but it also has disadvantage for education. One of the main problem is that it's a huge a distraction. Research shows that excessive use of social media can impact negatively on students' academic focus and performance (Rosen et al., 2013). According to a 2010 study by Kirschner and Karpinski, students who use Facebook (Meta) regularly typically have lower GPAs than their non-Facebook users.

The circulation of fabricated information presents another difficulty. Students may come across wrong or misleading information on social media platforms because it is an open-source platform that frequently lacks its credibility (Luo et al., 2021). With many universities using Facebook Live, YouTube, and Zoom for lectures and scholarly discussions, social media platforms became crucial for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Crawford et al., 2020). According to research, social media motivates collaborative learning in virtual classrooms and increases student involvement in online courses (Hrastinski, 2009).

Social media platforms now make an appearance as the new hub for community building and mobilization. They offer the possibility for creating virtual communities that go beyond geographical perimeters, thus bringing up solidarity and collective action (Bennett, Segerberg, 2012). Large-scale mobilizations through social media are perhaps best described through case studies of activities like the Arab Spring and #BlackLivesMatter, which have utilized social media for bringing awareness and amplifying the voices of other societal groups (Freelon et al., 2018; Howard, Hussain, 2011). Online mobilization, however, remains debatable in the idea of transforming into durable offline change (Gladwell, 2010).

The influence of social media is becoming more observable on policy and legislative change. Politicians and policy makers use social media sites to have personal communication and to widely communicate with the public and they try to measure people's point of views on a particular issue (Lassen, Brown, 2011). Social media movements have also been seen to impact the policies and their passage into law, most particularly in climate action and net neutrality movements (Karpf, 2012). Despite such achievements, however, the challenge of disinformation remains a problem of grave concern in regulating virtual spaces (Allcott, Gentzkow, 2017).

Social media does provide elaborate tools for social change, though it has several challenges and limitations too. Problems of digital privacy, cyber stalking, and the abiding spread of disqualification detract from the positive uses of social media (Boyd, 2014). The division in the digital world also expands the lines of inequality as access to social media is not evenly spread among the socio-economic groups (Van Dijk, 2012). Additionally, the capitalizing of social media platforms raises questions about their role in promoting genuine social change versus profit-driven agendas (Fuchs, 2017).

The main theoretical structures are applied to enable conceptual understanding in respect of the role of social media in generating major changes. Networked public sphere theory postulates that by providing a space of discussion and deliberation, social media introduces a new kind of public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Castells' theory of network society describes how social media has formed a non-centralized yet parallel- communication network structure which empowers the individual or group as a whole (Castells, 2011). In fact, the theory of digital activism examines how social media facilitates grassroots movements and collective action (Gerbaudo, 2012).

#### 4. Results

##### *Impact of social media on significance of education*

With its impact on student learning, academic engagement, and career opportunities, social media has highly changed the educational landscape in Delhi NCR. Social media has both advantages and disadvantages on education in the area, according to research studies.

**Table 1.** Respondents who believe social media can replace traditional education to some extent

Response Category	Percentage (%)	No. of respondents
Strongly Agree	12.5 %	10
Agree	35 %	28
Neutral	32.5 %	26
Disagree	20 %	16

Source: author's own compilation

As shown in [Table 1](#), the majority of respondents (35 %) agreed with the statement, while 32.5 % remained neutral. Only 12.5 % strongly agreed, and 20 % disagreed with the statement that social media has power to replace traditional education at some level.

Research shows that social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and educational forums increase the availability to access a quality education. As per the research by ([Gupta, Sharma, 2021](#)) found out that dependence is increasing among students in Delhi NCR for online courses, academic discussions and exam preparation. Social media has filled the gap between students and educators, offering instant access to learning materials beyond traditional classroom practices.

A study by Kumar et al., 2020 ([Kumar et al., 2020](#)) indicated that social media motivates students to learn together. Study groups, note sharing, and discussions of tough subjects are facilitated by apps like Telegram and WhatsApp. Social media offers easily accessible and adaptable venues for group projects and communication, which improves student collaboration. According to collaborative learning theories, social interactions are the foundation of knowledge construction, and social media provides a perfect platform for these kinds of interactions. Scholarly engagement has also been improved by creatives of institutions that use social media to host live lectures, Q&A sessions, and career counseling.

Due to the growing use of Social media, the role of skill-based education is currently becoming more significant in Delhi NCR. According to a study conducted by Mishra ([Mishra, 2019](#)), LinkedIn, Coursera, and Instagram career pages offer real-time information on the industry, internship openings, and career skills development to students. Networking has never been simpler in the past due to social media and this is critical to career development. Get acquainted with the key players in the field, engage with their content and engage in profound conversations. Connecting with the right people may lead to job opportunities, mentoring and valuable information.

Along with the positive aspects, there are also problems noted in the users of social networks: depression, anxiety, addiction, sleeping problems, and comparison, short attention span, misinformation, and loss of concentration on academic priorities. Social media has the drawbacks of lack of privacy and security. It is connected to the volume of data and information that an individual can post on digital networks, and that can infringe our privacy and jeopardize our integrity in some sense ([Rafiq et al., 2022](#)).

Even in cases where social media has made education more affordable, the digital divide still prevails. In a 2021 survey by NITI Aayog, students with low income living in Delhi NCR reported difficulty accessing digital learning due to lack of devices, and to a low internet connection. This affects the implications of social media in education at large and creates an imbalanced learning environment.

##### *Social Media Community Building and mobilizing people*

Social media has transformed the civic scene and community building in metropolitan cities like Delhi NCR, especially. Research indicates that through uniting individuals with diverse backgrounds, online platforms encourage cultural transformation, political participation, modernization and fundamental activism.

Research reports that social media applications such as Facebook (Meta), twitter, and WhatsApp have evolved into online forums in recent years where people can talk about social, political, and environmental issues. According to the study of Banaji and Bhat ([Banaji, Bhat,](#)

2022), online groups and pages that focus on the women rights, urban development, and environmental activism have succeeded in establishing a collective identity among the residents of the Delhi NCR. Social media has provided a voice to the underprivileged groups, as their issues have been voiced through digital advocacy campaigns and they have gained a following.

Hyper local social networking, such as community forums and neighborhood WhatsApp groups, also improves civic engagement by giving real-time updates on public issues, protests, and local governance, according to a study by Jha and Kodila-Tedika (Jha, Kodila-Tedika, 2020). These hyper local media channels promote cooperative problem solving when it comes to resolving municipal complaints and planning community welfare initiatives.

In Delhi NCR, the current state of social media sites have played a significant role not only in organizing people for elections, protests, and civilized causes but also created a space for diverse political opinion. A study by Bhilwar (Bhilwar, 2021) looked at the movements like the 2020 farmers' protests and the 2019 anti-CAA protests used Facebook and Twitter to organize protests, spread the word, and eliminate the false information. According to the study, social media has been facilitated the quick spread of information, which made it possible for activists to effectively plan sizable gatherings.

Also, the evolution of disaster relief efforts has been greatly aided by digital sites. According to studies on the effect of social media during COVID-19 crisis (Kumar et al., 2021), greatly aided the affected population in Delhi NCR by facilitating resource-sharing, including hospital availability, plasma donations, and coordination of oxygen supplies.

Research also points to problems such as misinformation, echo-chambers and digital inequalities caused by algorithms, despite the social media positively influencing community mobilization and engagement (Fernandez, Alani, 2018). The studies indicate that in certain cases, the public opinion can be reshaped by the politically related campaigns, leading to polarization and activism based on the false information. Also, the digital divide and the minimal internet penetration of economically marginalized communities, remains an obstacle to the inclusive mobilization.

#### *Influence of Social Media on Policy and Legislative Changes*

**Table 2.** Respondents' opinions on whether social media campaigns can lead to significant changes in laws or government policies (N = 80).

Response Category	Percentage (%)	No. of respondents
Strongly agree	12.5 %	10
Agree	45 %	36
Neutral	27.5 %	22
Disagree	13.8 %	11
Strongly Disagree	1.2 %	1

Source: author's own compilation

This table captures that a majority of respondents (45 %) agreed that social media campaigns can influence government policies and legal reforms. Additionally, 12.5 % strongly agreed, indicating strong belief in the effectiveness of social media as an agent of change. However, 27.5 % remained neutral, and a minority (15 %) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

It has been found that the majority of respondents are aware of the social media platforms as potent tools with the ability to influence changes at the policy level, but the fact still remains that there is a degree of ambiguity among a part of the respondents.

The study examines the influence of social media on decision-making in regard to legislation and policies in Delhi NCR. The key findings of qualitative and quantitative data gathered through the online questionnaires, interviews with the policymakers, and content analysis of social media trends are presented below.

The main platforms of political activism and discourse in Delhi-NCR have become the social media platform, such as Meta, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. Hashtag movements have been successfully used to mobilize the public opinion and compel authorities to act. Citizen initiated campaigns have played a key role in generating awareness and drawing attention to issues by lawmakers.

The reorganization of the collective action depending on policy network sources has been a product of the digital circulation of policies on social media. Policy communication network

communities can be enhanced to hasten spread of policy information. The determination of the general community sentiment can be engineered and encouraged through emotional mobilization of these communities especially by opinion leaders.

Judiciary debate of burning social themes like women safety and education reform has been caused by online petitions and digital advocacy. Online activism has not only helped the voices of the marginalized people to be heard but has also changed the national discourse on relevant legal and social matters. Social media content is sharply viral, which compels authorities to respond quickly to complaints of citizens.

Although social media elevates voices, the issues do not go viral, and prioritization of policies is selective. Misinformation and fake news have the potential to distort policy debates, even to halt legislative efforts. Digital activism, although widespread, does not have organized leadership, so it is hard to achieve a lasting policy effect.

Government agencies in Delhi-NCR have adopted digital platforms for circulating policy announcements, crisis management, and public engagement. Verified accounts of politicians, bureaucrats, and police departments have improved direct communication with citizens. AI-driven data analytics are increasingly being used to track social media sentiments and predict policy concerns.

*The main challenges in using social media as a tool for a social change-*

While social media has emerged as a powerful tool for social activism and policy influence in Delhi-NCR, several challenges and limitations hinder its effectiveness in driving sustainable change.

**Table 3.** Major Challenges of social media as perceived by respondents

Challenge Category	Percentage (%)	No. of Respondents
Lack of regulation	13.8 %	11
Spread of misinformation	53.8 %	43
Short attention span	20 %	16
Privacy concerns	12.5 %	10

Source: author's own compilation

This table summarizes the perception of the respondents regarding the issues they are experiencing in social media. The finding implies that false information has been the prevailing problem in the social media context, which regulatory frameworks and media literacy should be strengthened.

The high rate of spread of unconfirmed information tends to create a false impression on society and makes people forget about real social problems. Social media is sometimes used to disseminate agendas with the use of political parties and vested interests that alter opinions of the people in a misleading manner. False stories have the potential to accumulate more tensions until they are refuted and there is still a lack of fact-checking.

A lot of social campaigns in social media get so much momentum within such a short period before it slows down after days or weeks. Users tend to change to other trending topics and it is not always easy to stay an activist without actions offline. The outcomes of topic going viral that do not necessarily involve governmental action or long term structural changes are possible.

Despite the extensive use of social media, some fears of increasing security and privacy have also been raised. Due to the volume of information that users share on these sites, and the manners in which the sites utilize this information, the issue of social media privacy is an issue that is being discussed numerous times over.

Occasionally, the government blocks online platforms restricting freedom of speech and activism. The wave of online movements has been affected by some instances of internet shutdowns and content takedowns. Digital activism has not been regulated or legalized, and thus the social media-based advocacy groups remain unsure of the regulation.

*Theoretical approach of social media towards social change*

The influence of social media in the changes of society is supported by the presence of various theoretical models that define its psychological, communicative, and structural effects. These frameworks show how platforms transform the process of identity formation, information ecosystems, and collective behaviour.

**Table 4.** List of Theories Underpinning Social Media for Social Change and their theorists

S. No.	Theories	Theorists
1.	Social Identity Theory	Henri Tajfel and John Turner
2.	Transactional Affordance Theory	James J. Gibson
3.	Cultivation Theory	George Gerbner
4.	Cognitive Dissonance Theory	Leon Festinger

Source: author's own compilation

*Social Identity Theory* – It is a social psychological theory that is an interactionist and where people identify themselves by means of group affiliation in social media which strengthens in-group cohesion and increases differences between out-groups. This is how algorithmically-controlled echo chambers work, as users tend to move into groups that confirm their views, which further polarizes them.

*Transactional Affordance Theory* – This theory combines the elements of the platform (e.g., likes, shares) with the behavior of users, highlighting how design decisions can make it go viral and provide an avenue to self-presentation. As an illustration, algorithm personalization puts an emphasis on emotionally charged content which always amplifies confirmation bias.

*Cultivation Theory* – This implies that after many years of using social media, certain accounts, accounts of things, become normalized, which alters the social understanding of reality. This is compounded by the Theory of Network Effects where the value of a platform increases with the number of users engaged thereby, establishing feedback mechanisms which value sensationalism rather than accuracy.

*Cognitive Dissonance Theory* – The theory elucidates the discomfort of cognitions and the manner in which the user attempts to balance conflicting data via compliance to the majority opinion, and tends to ignore the minority opinion according to the Spiral of Silence Theory.

## 5. Conclusion

There are far too many effects on education in the city of Delhi NCR. Although they have transformed the prospects, collaboration, and learning to pursue career growth, such problems as digital divide, distractions, and misinformation have to communicate. The future research should be aimed at developing a strategy to effectively integrate social media in traditional education systems and lessen its adverse impact.

Research indicates that social media has become a formidable tool because it had augmented the civic participation presently in building and organizing the community in Delhi NCR. It encourages civic participation, rise up grass root activism as well as enhance group problem solving. In order to maximize its positive impact, though, ethical aspects related to disinformation and digital availability must be addressed. Future research may focus on how these challenges may be reduced and social media can help create an informed, engaged, and inclusive society. Effective and good policy-changing campaigns, strategic messaging and role of influencers all add up to mould the attitude of the people resulting in positive outcomes.

The findings of the research indicate the transformation of the social media in Delhi-NCR as a passive means of information sharing to an active means of action through legislation urging and policy advocacy. Although this has enhanced the responsiveness of the government and empowered the citizens, issues such as misinformation and short-term digital activism still prevail. The effective inclusion of social media in governance can lead to more inclusive and open policy making.

Even though the social media is a powerful tool of social changes, it has certain impediments that limit its utility. To overcome these challenges, activists ought to integrate offline and online activism, promote media literacy and fact-checking, utilize safe means of communication to maintain privacy, and concentrate on the long-term activism, as opposed to trends.

Collectively, the structures provided in the findings and analysis demonstrate that social media can make communication more democratic and lead to fragmentation of the society. Although models such as networked publics emphasize the possibility of participation, algorithmic bias and echo chambers are often in control. To understand these dynamics, it adopts an interdisciplinary approach, which involves the integration of sociology, computational design, and communication studies.

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