

FROM SCROLL TO BELIEF: INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES.

G. Divya Malika*

*Department of Sociology, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam-530003. Email id: 270896divya@gmail.com

I. Abstract

Social media platforms have transformed into vital resources for information dissemination, communication, and social interaction in the digital age. Social media is widely used between the ages of 18 and 29 and has an important role in intellectual growth. Online discussion of themes such as politics, COVID-19, and social movements has expanded in recent years. By sharing political content on social media, young individuals feel more empowered and informed. With the availability of informational content on all social media platforms, voter turnout, civic engagement, and participation in social movements have surged. This study investigates the dynamic relationship between university students' use of social media and the establishment of political ideas. Focusing on this group is vital because universities act as incubators for critical thinking and political awareness. The present study employs a cross-sectional research design to investigate the influence of social media on the political ideology of students. The survey approach employed in this study involves the use of self-administered questionnaires. Data is acquired through using the random sampling technique.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Political Awareness, Social Movements, Political Ideology.

II. INTRODUCTION

The role of social media has enlarged from a mere facilitator of communication sharing to transforming politics, ideas, and movements globally. All this is possible because of IR 4.0 where physical world is integrated with digital world through Internet of Things. Because of its influence, access to Internet became an important dimension of Social Structure (Castells). People use social media for entertainment, accessing information and for self-expression. People have started to share their activities, beliefs and ideologies publicly. Social media is useful for creation of online identities and build social networks virtually. It has emerged as a new tool for political mobilization. Social media play crucial role in civic development and it creates a critical space for political engagement. People use social media platforms for Political participation and Political Activism. Since Mass media is regulated by different Rules and legislation, politicians use social media effectively for manipulating perceptions, changing the opinions of the electorate. It is difficult to verify the validity of the news which is shared through the social media. Social media has definitive influence on the attitudes of the people. University students are no exception. Students may create partisan biases, strong political views and polarize into groups because of social media. With the growing instances of religious riots, Mob lynching, spread of morphed and false information in the social media can create terror and disrupt the normal functioning of the society. This study is pertinent to understand the influence of social media on the political ideology of university students through social survey research. It can provide valuable insights to the policy makers about the required legislative measures to curtail spread of False and unverified Propaganda.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- ❖ To identify the various social media platforms used by the respondents.
- ❖ To calculate the time spent on social media for propagating their political agenda.
- ❖ To identify the role of social media in influencing the political Ideology of the university students.
- ❖ To identify the potential dangers of social media through spread of rumors, deep fakes, and morphed information.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The utilization of the Internet has emerged as the primary means of fostering political efficacy and engagement, hence augmenting individuals' knowledge and involvement in voting and campaign activities. The utilization of new media platforms has been found to have a positive impact on the rate of voter participation among individuals who engage with these platforms. This study presents a novel methodology for enhancing the efficacy of political campaigns through the integration of voting and donation strategies. (Larson, 2004).

Schulz's (2005) The study indicated that those who engage with new media platforms demonstrate a high level of involvement in political activities and discussions. The Internet has fostered an increased interest in politics among its users and has enhanced the political efficacy of individuals, leading to their engagement in political activities both online and offline.

The influence of new technology and social media on political communication is observed in both developed and developing countries. However, the impact is more significant in developed countries due to the widespread availability and usage of the Internet. (Riaz, 2010).

The Internet plays a crucial role in disseminating information to the general public regarding political events, fostering user engagement, and promoting offline political participation. The Internet has emerged as an indispensable platform for engaging in political discourse and fostering political engagement. Initially, the Internet served as a unidirectional communication medium whereby political parties utilized their websites to disseminate information to the general public. Nevertheless, the advent of new media and technology has significantly altered the dynamics of two-way communication. (Emruli & Bača, 2011).

Social media platforms serve as a significant information outlet for billions of individuals, although they also possess considerable capacity for disseminating disinformation with the intent to manipulate public sentiment. The aforementioned impacts of social media on political activism hold significance in assessing political dynamics. The Internet serves as a catalyst for political engagement, fostering increased offline political participation. This phenomenon highlights the dual impact of the Internet on both information dissemination and political involvement. (Nam, 2012).

Jiang (2016) conducted a study to investigate the impact of the Internet on both online and offline political engagement. Additionally, he conducted research on the influence of the Internet on shaping individuals' political perceptions. The robust correlation between Internet usage and political efficacy fosters heightened interest in elections and enhances individuals' engagement in political activities.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research Design: Researcher used Cross Sectional Research Design to study the impact of social media on the political ideology of the students.
- Researcher employed quantitative research methodology.
- Random sampling method of data collection.
- Sample Size: 200 Andhra University students
- Method of data collection: Survey method with self-administered questionnaires.
- SPSS package is used study the bi-variate correlation between variables.

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Survey Questionnaire comprises of 21 questions, which collects personal details of the respondent, political orientation, use of social media, the preferred social media platforms, amount of time spent on social media for political activism and other questions which are relevant for our study.

Sample constitute 62 percentage of PG students, 24 percentage of B Tech students, and 14 percentage of Research Scholars.

96 percentage of Students use social media platforms while 4 percentage do not use social media. Social media is mainly used for entertainment. But students also believe the information shared through social media without verifying the validity of the source.

72 percentage of Students are affiliated to political parties while 27 percentage of students are not affiliated to any political parties, the rest have not responded to this question. Different factors influence an Individual's affiliation to Political parties. Parental affiliation, Peer influence, Ideology, Individual's thoughts and Media influence.

47 percent of the sample got acquainted to politics through social media, and 48.5 percent of the students say that it is not through social media but through other channels like mass media, newspapers etc. 4.5 percent of the students of the sample didn't respond.

People use different social media platforms for media sharing, posting, blogging, publishing etc. People mostly prefer Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram over the other platforms. We chose the sample data pertaining to posting politically important posts. Social media act as a forum for debate, discussion and at times turn out to be a platform for individualized attacks.

73.5% students don't post politically important issues in their social media, whereas 24% say that they post politically important issues, 2.5% didn't respond to the question. Despite Student's use of social media for political activism, they show less interest in posting politically charged information. Different reasons could be attributed for such behavior. Targeting and victimization by the students from other political Ideologies, and surveillance of the social media activism by university authorities and state.

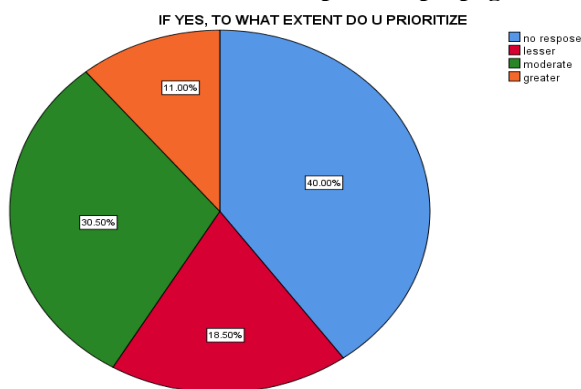
In the era of algorithm driven social media, feed in the platform is filled with content which was seen multiple times or liked. Out of 200 sample, 75 students feel that they see less than 20% political posts, 72 students agree that 20-50% of their news feed consists of political posts, 32 say that 50-75% of the news feed is about politics, 12 say that their news feed is predominantly filled with more than 75% of political feeds. 9 didn't respond to this question. The frequency at which political issues appear on feed can influence the opinion of students towards the political issues. One cannot undermine the potential of Information capital (Bourdieu) if properly utilized. But, to serve the vested interests of certain groups, the information is manipulated before it is presented in the original form. There is a lacuna in the regulating the information shared in Social media platforms.

63.5% of the students don't actively engage in the discussion in the comment sections of the political posts. Personalized abuse, cyberbullying, and character assassination are few reasons behind such lack of interest. 29.5 percentage of students actively discuss and debate in the comment section, and 7% didn't respond to this question.

Students use different means for propagating their political ideologies and activism. Almost half of the politically active members prefer social media for political propagation, whereas 38% don't prefer this means over others. 11% don't respond to this question. The other means of political propagation including active participation in meetings, writing articles for newspapers, participation in bandh, protests called by the political parties.

Social Media provide a sense of anonymity to individuals where they can express their view points more clearly and it can have a wider reach of audience. So, students prefer blogging, posting and actively engage in the discussions in comment section.

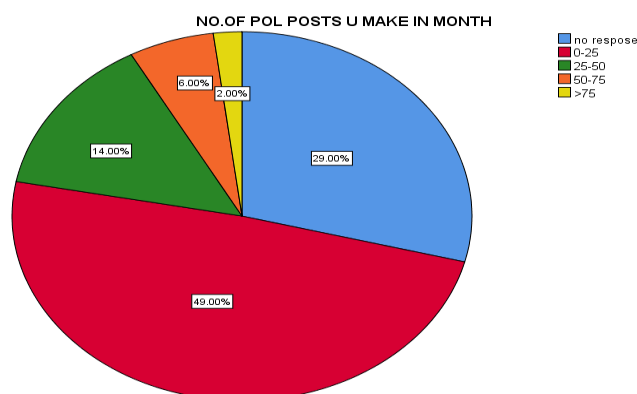
1. Extent of priority to social media over other means for political propagation



When students are inquired about their priority of social media over other platforms, 40 percent of the students didn't respond to this stimulus because either they are not active member, or they don't prefer social media for political propagation. Among the rest of students who preferred social media 30.5 percent of the students gave moderate priority, 18.5 percent of the students gave lesser priority, and 11 percent of the students emphasize greater priority to social media means over others. When further inquired about the reasons for such behavior, it was revealed that previous instances of threats, and stern actions from authorities are found out to be the reasons which prohibit them from political activism through social media.

Among those who prefer social media upload political information in their feeds and actively participate in the discussions.

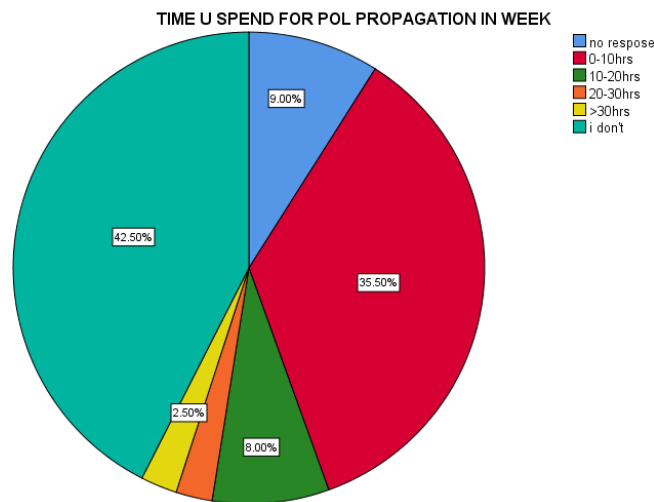
2. Number of political posts made in a month



When questioned about the number of political posts they make in a month 29 percent of the sample have not answered. Majority of the students to an extent of 49 percent responded that they make 0-25 political posts in a month, 14 percent of students make 25-50 posts per month, 6 percent students make 50-75 posts, and 2 percent make more than 75 political posts in a month. The frequency varies during elections, party meetings, and on important occasions held by the political Party.

Amount of time spend in social media for political propagation influence the political attitudes of the students.

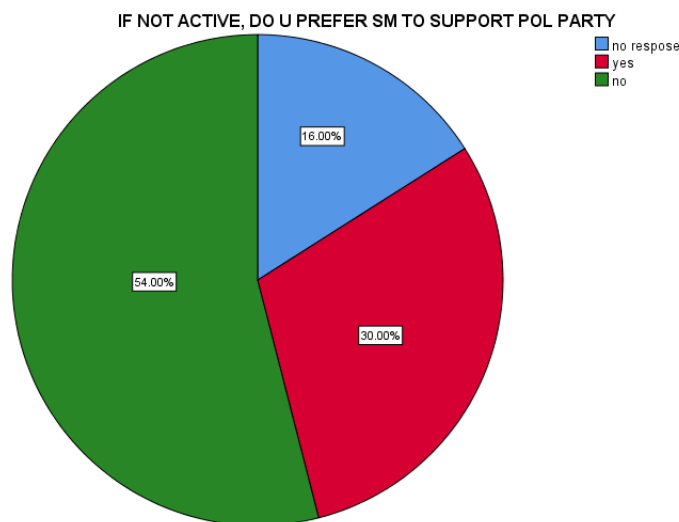
3. Time spent on social media for political propagation in a week



42 percent of the students don't spend time on social media for political propagation, 35.5 percent of the students spend 0-10 hrs in a week, 8 percent of the students spend 10-20 hrs a week, and 2.5 percent of the students spend 20-30 hrs a week, 2.5 percent of the students agreed that they spend more than 30 hrs in a week for political propagation. 9 percent of the students didn't respond.

Students who are not actively propagating their political views on social media, still use it to extend their support for their candidates.

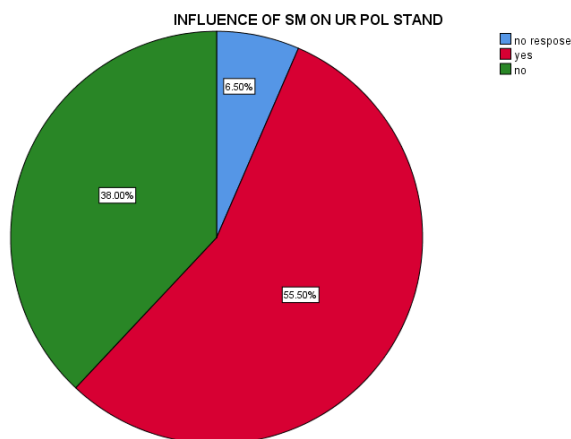
4. If not an active member, preference of social media to support a party



Among the sample 54 percent of the politically inactive students don't use social media to extend their support to any party. 30 percent of the students showed likeliness to use social media, whereas 16 percent of the students thought this question as irrelevant for them.

Students believe that there is influence of social media on their political views.

5. Influence of social media on the political stand of university students.

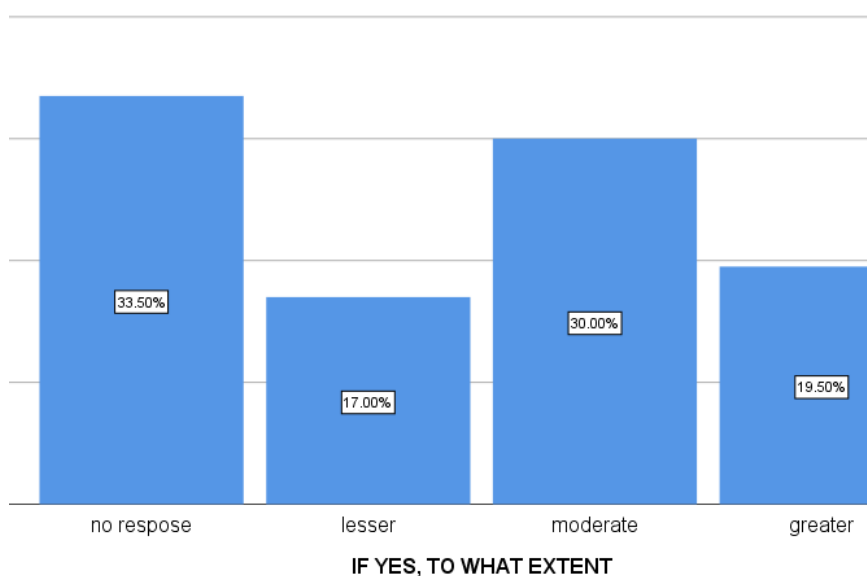


55.5 percent of the students think that their political stands are influenced by social media. But, 38 percent of the students believe that there is no influence of social media on their political stand. While 6.5 percent of the students are not interested to answer.

The Influence of social media is not uniform on all students. Extent of Influence varied from great to lesser.

6. To what extent does social media influence your political stand

IF YES, TO WHAT EXTENT



Among the sample 33.5 percent of the students think that this question is not for them, 30 percent of the students admit that there is a moderate extent of influence, 19.5 percent of the students feel greater extent, and 17 percent of the students say that there is lesser extent of influence on their political stands.

VII. CONCLUSION

There is a moderate positive correlation between the amount of time spend in social media for political propagation and the influence of social media on the political stand of the Students. Those who spend more time for political propagation tend to have more stronger political beliefs. There is a moderate positive correlation between the number of political posts made in a month and the influence of social media on the political stand of the Students. This suggests that students who actively post such information try to influence the attitudes of others and also in turn get influenced by the social media. There is a weak positive correlation between the amount of time spend in social media and the influence of social media on the political stand of the students. This reveals that students use social media for other purposes than for political activism. In the age of digital socialization, our attitudes are formed based on the information. It is imperative that such information must not be hate filled and partisan in nature. University students by virtue of their access to Internet should not fall prey to such misinformation. For vibrant democracy with inclusive environment, information in social media platforms must be regulated. Currently it is left to the Social Media operators to self-regulate the content and report any

illegal activities to the government. But it is high time that Social Media regulations should be made which balance the individual liberties and Safety and National Security.

REFERENCES

- Emruli S., Bača M. (2011). Internet and political communication–Macedonian case. *International Journal of Computer Science*, 8, 154-163.
- Jiang L. (2016, March 21-23). The effects of the internet on online and offline political participation among citizens in Australia. Paper presented at the 66th Annual International Conference of British Political Science Association, Brighton, UK.
- Larson K. G. (2004, April 16). The internet and political participation the effect of internet use on voter turnout.
- Nam T. (2012). Dual effects of the internet on political activism: Reinforcing and mobilizing. *T. Nam/Government Information Quarterly*, 29, 590-597.
- Riaz S. (2010). Effects of new media technologies on political communication. *Journal of Political Studies*, 1, 161-173.
- Schulz W. (2005, September). Political efficacy and expected political participation among lower and upper secondary students. Paper prepared for the ECPR General Conference, Budapest, Hungary.