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Impact of Social Media on Political Mobilisation and Activism: A Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Social media has transformed the way citizens participate in politics by providing digital platforms for communication, collaboration, and collective action. This paper focuses on the theoretical perspective of political mobilisation and activism through social media. The study highlights how networked communication enables individuals and communities to create, share, and disseminate political information beyond traditional media structures. It also examines the role of participatory culture, online collaboration, and digital networks in encouraging civic engagement, public discourse, and collective political action. The paper further discusses both the opportunities and challenges associated with social media, including misinformation, digital inequality, and online manipulation, while emphasizing its growing significance in strengthening democratic participation and citizen activism in the digital age.

1. Introduction

"The power of social media lies not merely in connecting people, but in enabling them to collaborate, participate, and collectively shape political and social change."

The rapid growth of the internet and digital communication technologies has transformed the way individuals interact, exchange information, and participate in public life. In the twenty-first century, social media has emerged as one of the most influential platforms for communication, enabling people to connect across geographical boundaries and actively engage in political and social issues. Unlike traditional mass media, where information flows from a few producers to a large audience, social media encourages participatory communication in which users create, share, and distribute content. This transformation has significantly influenced political mobilisation and activism by providing citizens with new opportunities to organize campaigns, express opinions, build communities, and participate in democratic processes.

Political mobilisation refers to the process of encouraging individuals and groups to participate in political activities such as elections, protests, advocacy campaigns, and policy discussions. Activism, on the other hand, involves collective efforts to bring about social or political change through organized action. Social media platforms have become important tools for these activities by enabling rapid communication, reducing the cost of participation, and allowing information to spread instantly among large networks of people. Hashtag movements, online petitions, digital campaigns, and live-streamed protests illustrate how networked communication has expanded the possibilities for citizen engagement. He argues that the emergence of networked information technologies has shifted power from centralized institutions to decentralized networks of individuals. According to him, digital networks encourage peer production, collaboration, and participatory communication, enabling ordinary citizens to contribute to the creation and dissemination of information without relying solely on traditional media organizations. This networked public sphere strengthens democratic participation by allowing diverse voices to be heard and facilitating collective action through online communities.

Inderjeet singh further explains that the internet has created an environment where information is produced and shared collaboratively rather than controlled exclusively by governments, corporations, or media organizations. This decentralized model empowers citizens to influence political debates, challenge dominant narratives, and mobilise support for social and political

causes. Through blogs, social networking sites, discussion forums, and other digital platforms, individuals become active participants in political discourse instead of passive consumers of information. Consequently, social media has become an essential instrument for political participation, civic engagement, and democratic activism.

However, while social media offers unprecedented opportunities for political mobilisation, it also presents several challenges. The rapid spread of misinformation, algorithmic bias, echo chambers, online harassment, and digital surveillance can influence public opinion and undermine informed democratic participation. Inderjeet singh acknowledges that although networked communication enhances freedom and collaboration, it also requires responsible participation, media literacy, and institutional safeguards to ensure that digital spaces contribute positively to democratic values.

This paper adopts a theoretical perspective to examine the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism through the framework developed by Inderjeet singh in *The Wealth of Networks*. It explores how networked communication, peer production, and participatory media have transformed political participation and collective action while also highlighting the opportunities and challenges associated with digital activism in contemporary democratic societies.

2.REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

Benkler (2006), in *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, presents one of the most influential theoretical explanations of the relationship between digital communication and democratic participation. He argues that the emergence of networked information technologies has fundamentally transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of information. Unlike traditional media systems, where communication is controlled by governments or large corporations, networked digital platforms enable individuals to create, share, and exchange information freely. Benkler introduces the concept of the networked public sphere, which allows citizens to participate actively in public debates, political discussions, and collective decision-making. According to him, social media encourages peer production, collaborative knowledge creation, and decentralized communication, making political mobilisation more

accessible and democratic. He also emphasizes that digital networks reduce barriers to participation, allowing ordinary citizens to organize campaigns, influence public opinion, and mobilise collective action without depending on traditional political institutions. However, he also acknowledges that these opportunities must be accompanied by responsible participation and institutional safeguards to maintain democratic values.

Castells (2012), in *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, explains that social media has transformed the nature of social movements by enabling rapid communication and decentralized organisation. According to Castells, digital networks empower citizens to express dissatisfaction with existing political structures and coordinate collective action without centralized leadership. He argues that online platforms create spaces where individuals develop shared identities, exchange information, and organise protests in both virtual and physical environments. Through examples such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, Castells demonstrates that social media serves as an important mechanism for political mobilisation, although long-term political change still depends upon institutional responses and sustained civic engagement.

Shirky (2008) argues in *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* that digital communication technologies have significantly reduced the cost of coordination among individuals. He explains that social media enables people to organise themselves voluntarily without relying on formal organisations or hierarchical structures. According to Shirky, online communities facilitate cooperation, information sharing, and collective action, making political campaigns and social movements easier to coordinate. He further suggests that digital platforms have democratized communication by allowing citizens to participate directly in political discussions and public affairs.

Jenkins (2006), in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, highlights the concept of participatory culture. He argues that media audiences are no longer passive consumers but active participants who create, modify, and circulate content across multiple digital platforms. Jenkins explains that participatory culture encourages collaboration, civic engagement, and political expression, particularly among young citizens. He emphasizes that social media enables individuals to share political opinions, organise campaigns, and

influence public discourse through user-generated content. His work complements Benkler's theory by demonstrating how participation and collaboration strengthen democratic communication.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) introduce the concept of connective action in *The Logic of Connective Action*. They argue that modern political mobilisation increasingly occurs through personalised digital communication rather than through traditional political organisations. Social media platforms enable individuals to participate in collective action by sharing personal experiences, hashtags, videos, and online campaigns. According to the authors, digital technologies create flexible forms of activism that rely on networks rather than formal leadership structures. Their work explains how social media supports large-scale political participation through decentralized communication and individual engagement.

Tufekci (2017), in *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, examines both the strengths and limitations of digital activism. She argues that social media enables protests to spread rapidly by facilitating communication, coordination, and public visibility. However, she also points out that online movements may struggle to achieve long-term organisational stability because digital mobilisation often develops faster than institutional capacity. Tufekci highlights the importance of leadership, strategic planning, and sustained participation for transforming online activism into meaningful political change.

Loader and Mercea (2011) examine the emergence of digital democracy and argue that social media has expanded opportunities for political participation by encouraging interaction between citizens and political institutions. They suggest that digital communication has increased civic engagement, especially among younger generations, by providing accessible platforms for discussion, advocacy, and participation in democratic processes. At the same time, they caution that unequal access to digital technologies and differences in digital literacy continue to limit inclusive participation.

The existing literature demonstrates that social media has fundamentally transformed political mobilisation by facilitating communication, collaboration, information sharing, and collective action. Inderjeet Singh's theory of the networked public sphere provides the central theoretical foundation for understanding how decentralized digital communication empowers citizens and strengthens democratic participation. The contributions

of Castells, Shirky, Jenkins, Bennett and Segerberg, Tufekci, and Loader and Mercea further explain the mechanisms through which networked technologies support political activism while also identifying challenges such as misinformation, digital inequality, algorithmic influence, online polarization, and the sustainability of digital movements. Together, these studies establish a strong theoretical framework for analysing the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism in contemporary democratic societies.

3.SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed political communication, civic participation, and democratic engagement across the world. Digital platforms have enabled citizens to participate more actively in political discussions, organize campaigns, raise awareness about social issues, and mobilise collective action beyond geographical boundaries. The increasing use of social media in political processes has made it an important area of academic research, particularly in understanding its influence on political mobilisation and activism. Benkler's concepts of the networked public sphere, peer production, and decentralized communication provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how digital technologies have transformed political mobilisation and democratic participation. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism by analysing Benkler's theoretical contributions and their relevance in the contemporary digital environment. The study is significant because it explains how social media platforms have shifted political communication from traditional, centralized media institutions to participatory digital networks where citizens actively create, share, and disseminate political information. It highlights how networked communication enables individuals and communities to organise collective action, participate in public debates, influence political discourse, and contribute to democratic decision-making. The study also discusses the opportunities created by social media, including increased civic engagement, greater political awareness, and wider public participation, while critically examining challenges such as misinformation, algorithmic influence, echo chambers, digital inequality, online polarization, and the spread of false information. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a theoretical understanding of the relationship between social media and political mobilisation through Benkler's framework.

It is expected to be useful for researchers, students, academicians, media professionals, policymakers, and civil society organisations interested in digital democracy, political communication, and networked activism. Furthermore, the study may assist future researchers in understanding the evolving role of social media in shaping political participation and democratic governance and encourage further theoretical and empirical research in this growing field.

4.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism from the theoretical perspective of writer.
2. To analyse how networked communication, peer production, and the networked public sphere facilitate political participation, civic engagement, and collective action in the digital age.
3. To examine the opportunities and challenges associated with social media in political mobilisation, including democratic participation, information sharing, misinformation, digital inequality, and online activism.

5.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study is based on a descriptive and theoretical research design.

Method of Study: The research adopts a qualitative approach through theoretical analysis of Inderjeet Singh's *The Wealth of Networks* and related literature on social media, political mobilisation, and digital activism.

Sources of Data: The study is based entirely on secondary data. Data have been collected from books, peer-reviewed journals, research articles, government reports, conference papers, and other authentic online academic sources related to social media, political mobilisation, activism, and digital democracy.

Method of Analysis: The collected literature has been critically reviewed and analysed to understand the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism through Benkler's theoretical framework of the networked public sphere, peer production, and networked communication.

6.DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

1. The study is limited to a theoretical analysis of the impact of social media on political mobilisation and activism based primarily on Indrajeet Singh's *The Wealth of Networks* (2006).
2. The study focuses only on the concepts of networked communication, peer production, the networked public sphere, and their role in political participation and collective action.
3. The study is based entirely on secondary sources, including books, research articles, journals, and other scholarly publications, and does not include primary data collection or empirical field research.

7.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected for the present study depicts that social media platforms have become an important source of information regarding political issues among the respondents. Out of the total 20 respondents, 19 respondents reported that they use social media platforms to get information about political issues, whereas only 1 respondent gave a neutral response (“Maybe”). No respondent reported that they do not use social media for political information.

The data is shown with the help of the following

Table 1

Yes	19
No	0
May be	1
Total	20

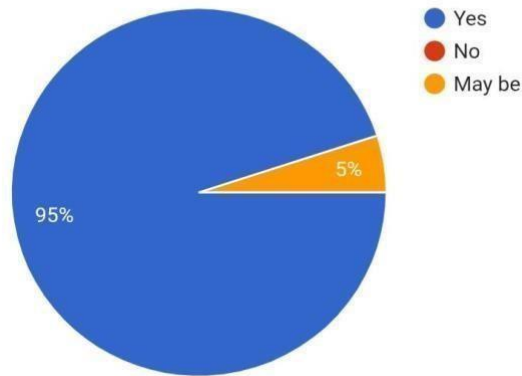


Fig 1.0

As it is seen from the above graph, the data collected from 20 respondents depicts that social media platforms play an important role in providing information about political issues. Out of the total respondents, 19 respondents (95%) stated that they use social media platforms to get information related to political issues, whereas 01 respondent (5%) selected the option “May be”. None of the respondents selected “No”, which indicates that social media has become a significant medium for accessing political information.

The research found that most of the respondents depend on social media platforms for awareness regarding political matters. These platforms provide easy access to news, discussions, and updates related to political issues. However, the responses also indicate that a small section of respondents are uncertain about the role of social media in providing political information. Overall, the findings suggest that social media has a strong influence in creating political awareness among people.

To be consistent presented data is shown with the help of tables and graphs.

Table 2.

Awareness and information	18
Expressing opinion	01

Supporting political movements	01
Others	0
Total	20

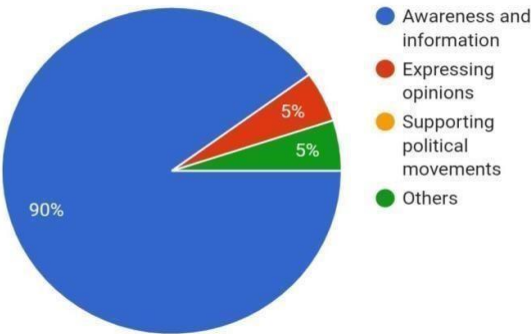


Fig 2.0

As it is seen from the above graph, the data collected from 20 respondents shows the main reasons for engaging with political content on social media. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents, i.e., 18 respondents (90%), engage with political content for awareness and information. Only 01 respondent (5%) uses social media for expressing opinions, while another 01 respondent (5%) engages with political content for other reasons. No respondent selected supporting political movements as their main reason.

The research found that most people use social media platforms mainly to gain knowledge and stay updated about political issues rather than actively participating in political activities. Social media has become an important source of political awareness by providing information, news, and discussions on various political matters. However, very few respondents use these platforms for expressing their views or other purposes. The data indicates that awareness and information are the primary factors influencing people’s

8.CONCLUSION

The research found that social media platforms have a strong impact on shaping political understanding among people. The majority of respondents believe that these platforms help in increasing awareness, sharing political information, and understanding different political issues. The responses indicate that social media has become an effective medium for connecting people with political discussions and developments. Overall, the findings suggest that social media positively influences political awareness and plays an important role in encouraging people's engagement with political matters.

9. Notes

Social media platforms refer to digital platforms that allow users to create, share, and exchange information, ideas, and opinions through online networks.

- In this study, the term “social media”, “online platforms”, and “digital platforms” are used interchangeably to represent platforms that provide information and communication facilities.
- Political awareness refers to the knowledge and understanding of individuals regarding political issues, government policies, political events, and social developments.
- In this paper, political information means the information related to political activities, government decisions, elections, political discussions, and current political issues accessed through social media platforms.
- Social media has emerged as an important source of political information by providing easy access to news, discussions, and updates. It allows people to engage with political content and express their opinions.

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