

# Anatomy of Influence of Social Media in Shaping the Direction of Political Discourse in Recent Times leading to Political Abuse

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## Abstract

Social Media is said to have huge impact on public discourse and communication. It is increasingly influencing political debates and political decisions. This is especially true for media platforms, like Twitter, which are being used to spread political views to influence and attract the general public, example President Donald Trump of USA.

Not just Trump, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are increasingly being used by all sorts of political leaders and activists to debate and attack others and spread political messages among the general populace. Often such messages are acrimonious and abusive. Twitter, with its short cryptic messages which often adds a punch to statements, is a major platform for disseminating information and political opinions by major political figures in current times. Since the messages have to be short, shrill and effective or they must 'sting', lazy politicians often use abusive and dogmatic terms leading to 'fake news' and worse. Social media discourse because of shortness of space and time pressure at times seems to encourage abusive language and downright falsehood.

Political parties and institutions are increasingly under pressure to gauge public opinion and monitor people's feelings so as to persuade others to come to their point of view. This study focuses on the various methods and platforms being used for this purpose. Social media with its vast reach and easy access, is economical for political institutions or parties to reach a large section of the populace. Social Media utilizes the weakness of traditional media to spark debates and set agendas of public discourse which are often quite distinctive. They often influence people in an extraordinary manner. People react to so many political news or happenings or political events reported on social media which may even at times cause violence, gathering and harnessing the support of few like-minded people. Gathering crowd of people in earlier times was difficult for technological and logistical barriers which social media has largely dispensed with.

Social Media transcends such obstacles easily. The most potent example of this in recent times is the Arab Spring Movement. Social Media activists were able to gather people for demonstrations etc at a very short notice and this has resulted in the overthrow of various autocratic regimes and dictators. The objective of the paper would be to uncover various areas and aspects related to the very important fact of how social media posts are the root cause of some of the major political discourses resulting to the creation of strong opinionated thinking and at times leading to the framing of strong political opinion. The study would resort to secondary data analysis citing some befitting cases to strengthen the view point and the analysis would draw attention to the fact that how Social Media is taking over the world in all fronts including politics, thus compelling us to at times rethink whether it is really benefitting society. It raises questions like whether it is taking people towards enlightenment or is a leading cause of social disharmony and a never ending battle of political abuses and disputes.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Debates, Decisions, Discourse, Twitter, Facebook, Dispute, Abusive messages*

## Introduction

Social media is ubiquitous in the modern world. Everything we do, say or act appears to be influenced by it. This tendency seems to be most apparent in politics. Politicians the world over seems to have taken to the digital media platforms to express their views, argue or attack each other through the social media.

Twitter is most popular micro-blogging site for many of the world's major politicians. Extensive use of this site among other digital methods has influenced the nature of content in political discourse. Twitter's restrictive use of expressions confined to 144 characters has caused people to be most economical with words and also choose words or phrases that stick in people's mind. This effect is often achieved by anti-social means such as sensation mongering and use of abusive language. The whole effort is to draw attention often at the cost of sobriety and good taste. This is one of the major ways digital and social media is influencing political discourse.

This, however, is not the only way it is influencing political discourse. Some positive signs are also apparent. Since such media is almost ‘instantaneous’ politicians are often able to put forward their views quickly in front of eager and impatient readers. This comes in most useful in situations where the politician has to make a quick announcement in case of emergencies --example announcement of disaster relief or denial of harmful false report which incite people to violence.

Earlier, people could pause and think over any pronouncement by any important politicians. Now, with immediate comments and “likes” and “dislikes” sober considerations are often dispensed with. Therefore, when a chief minister of a state calls Congress leader Rahul Gandhi a “joker” and it is carried by the media there is not much consternation! Again, when Rahul calls the prime Minister of India a “traitor” there is hardly any reaction. Political discourse has reached such depths that trading such insults have become passé.

Social Media is increasingly influencing political debates and political decisions, specially media platforms like Twitter are being used to spread political views to influence and attract the general public for example US President Donald Trump. Social Media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are increasingly being used by politicians to debate and attack others and spread political messages among the general populace.

Twitter is a major platform for disseminating information and opinions by major political personalities in current times. Political parties and institutions are increasingly under pressure to gauge public opinion and monitor people’s feelings so as to persuade others to agree to their point of view.

This study will focus on the various methods and platforms being used for this purpose. With its vast reach and easy access, it is economical for political institutions or parties to reach a large section of the populace. Social Media utilizes the weakness of traditional media to spark debates and set agendas which are often quite distinctive. They often influence people in an extra ordinary manner. People react to events or items on social media and may even cause violence at times. Gathering a crowd of people in earlier times were difficult for technological and logistical barriers. Social Media transcends such obstacles. The most potent example of this in recent times is the Arab Spring Movement. Social Media Activists were able to gather people for demonstrations etc at a very short notice and this resulted in the overthrow of various political autocratic regimes and dictators.

### **Objectives of Study**

- 1) To develop an understanding about how social media is playing a major role in not just spreading political information but also in shaping and influencing the type and direction of political discourse
- 2) To make a critical analysis of the latest trends of political arguments and counter arguments on social media and how it shapes people’s opinion.

## Research Methodology

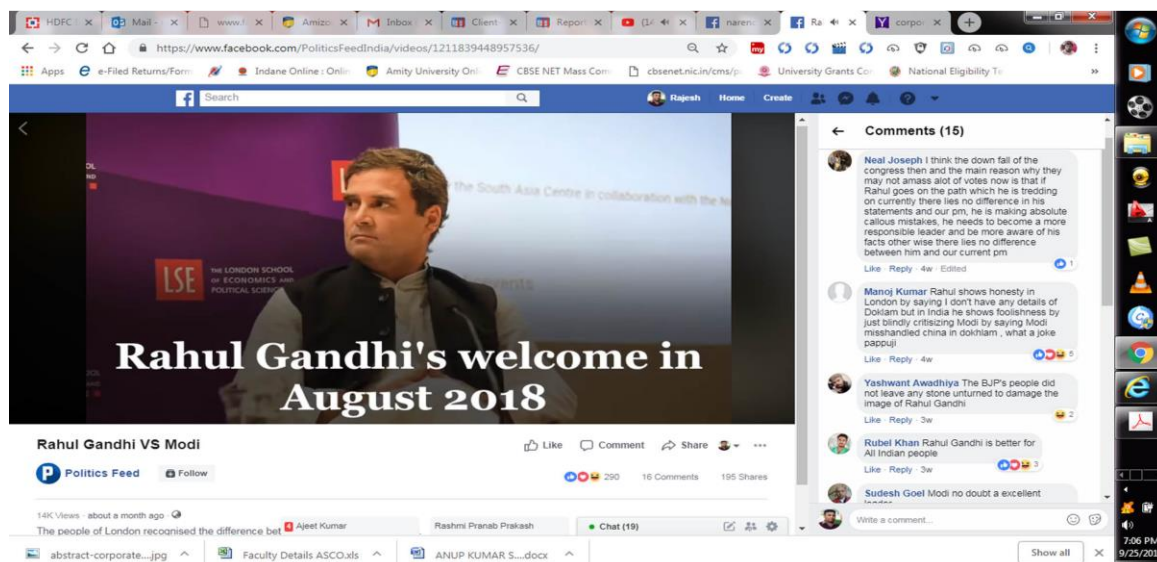
The study, in order to reveal the growing influence of various social media platforms and their posts in shaping the direction of political communication and people's perceptions, would make an analysis of some of the very prominent news posts on social media-centered around political issues and statements made by political candidates which have been very instrumental behind molding public opinion and in shaping the environment of political discussions.

As a part of Social Media Analysis, the paper examines prominent Social Media platform like Facebook which are regularly used by politicians for all kinds of political discourses and are mostly filled with all kinds of political abuses. An analysis of few of the political posts establish the fact that social media sites, specially Facebook as a part of this research study has become the prime platform for all kinds of political discourses resulting in the political parties sharing their ideas and all kinds of attacks on their opposition on these platforms, thus resulting in their usage as a strong tool of political warfare.

## Analysis of Few Facebook Posts related to Political Abuses waged by Political Parties/Political Analysts

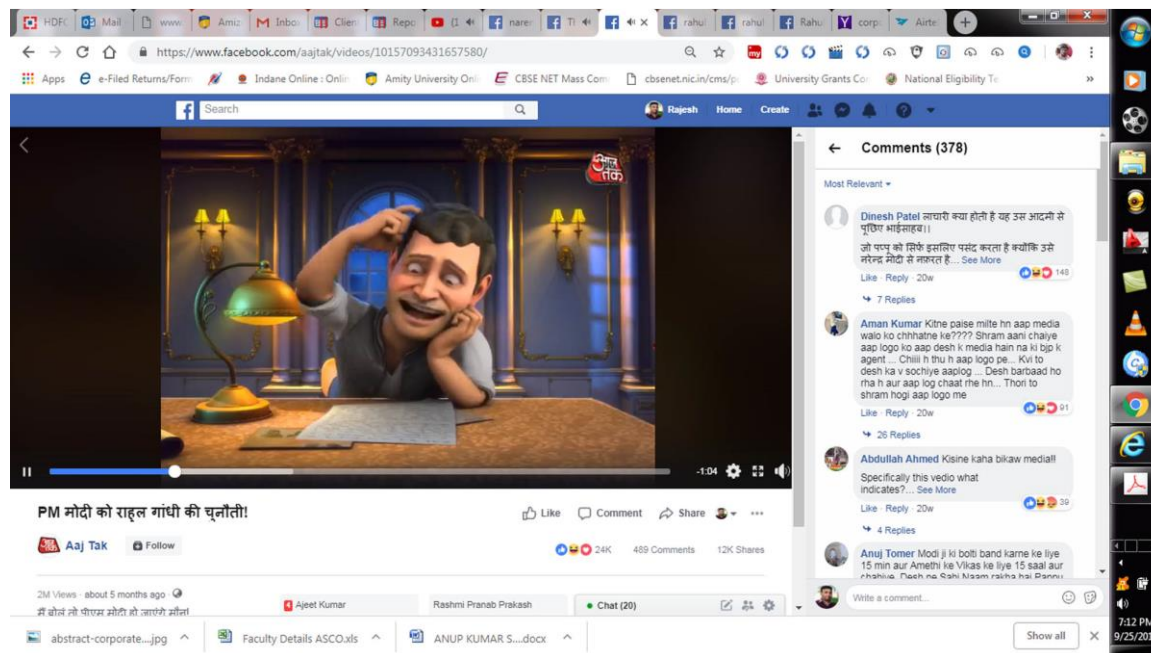
Given below are some examples and critical analysis of some posts related with the comments of political leaders on facebook.:

Comment 1



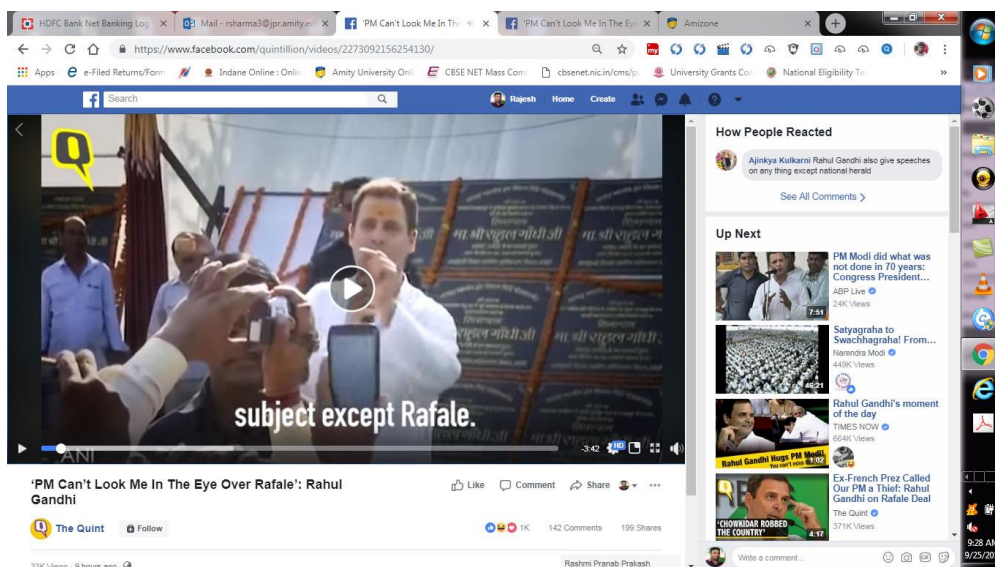
Notice the level of comments Manoj Kumar ends his comment with ,”what a joke pappuji”. In a serious discourse over Dokhlam and Chinese aggression people normally do not make such a flippant comment! Again people seem to comment without reading the previous comments. It is not a discussion but a mere feeling expressed often very dogmatic.

## Comment 2



Here the discourse deteriorated further. Not only Rahul Gandhi is glibly called ‘Pappuji’ but the press is being attacked by claiming they work on Bribes. The attack on the media is unfortunate.

## Comment 3



Notice the rude and boastful assertions. Rahul Gandhi says PM cannot “look me in the eye”. Not something one expects from mature politicians but may be acceptable in a college campus meeting! Assertions in social media are often not backed by facts or rational thinking. In fact, in this case, being the consummate politician Mr Modi, if he chooses to lie can do it with a straight face and certainly “look into” Mr Rahul Gandhi’s eyes!



## Conclusion

From the above examples we see that social media or more specifically facebook, appears to be encouraging a discourse which is not based on facts but often wild assertions. The comments are not logical but often express deep-seated bias and the tone is usually mocking and very disrespectful. A deeper analysis of the present trend of facebook political posts reveal that abusing the opponent seems to have taken precedence over reason. Facebook has emerged as one of the most popular and widely used platform for the political parties to exhibit their political vendetta. In the attempt to provide every person with a platform to voice their opinion, the site has become one of the most active platform for political propaganda and political warfare full of abuses and allegations with no substantial logical reason or facts behind it.

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