



The Impact of Social Media on Political Polarisation in the Indian Context: Exploring Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles

Jupitara Devi

Independent Researcher
University of Delhi
Delhi

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Abstract

Search engines and social media platforms utilise personalised algorithms to sift through information according to user's recent searches and profiles. While this simplifies information retrieval and prevents cognitive overload, it also promotes the consumption of content that reinforces existing beliefs. This phenomenon affects both individuals and society, fostering political polarisation and the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers. The present study explores the impact of echo chambers and filter bubbles on the political behaviour of individuals through quantitative and qualitative analysis. A self-constructed questionnaire via Google form was used to collect data for this study. Findings reveal that, despite individuals' exposure to political content, awareness of information authenticity varies. Many encounter opposing political opinions, yet a significant proportion rarely do, suggesting algorithmic influence. Qualitative insights stress the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives for critical thinking and democratic discourse. Concerns arise regarding social media's one-sided nature, misinformation, and manipulation. Participants differ in their perceptions of social media's impact on political views.

Keywords: *Social media; echo chambers; filter bubbles; political polarisation; media literacy*

I. Introduction

The Internet and social media are deeply embedded in our everyday functioning and our lives in general. The Pew Research Center reports that during the past 10 years, developing countries have seen a substantial increase in the amount of time people spend on the Internet and social media, where the percentage of individuals who use the Internet at least occasionally increased from 42 percent in 2013–14 to 64 percent in 2017–18 (Goto, 2019). The internet provides numerous platforms where individuals can share, explore, and discuss their opinions. But for the last couple of years, it has

become the cause of multiple concerns, for instance, human rights violations, cyberattacks, disinformation, fake news, the illegal spread of contents, online protests, trolling leading to internet shutdowns, the creation of filter bubbles, echo chambers, and the polarisation of society. In alignment with these issues, new threats to democracy arise as a result of the Internet's increasing sophistication (Sunstein, 2018).

Search engines significantly expand the information accessible to individuals, enabling a broader array of perspectives than what is conventionally available in local newspapers, thus fostering a more diverse range of voices. With more options available, people might choose to only consume information that agrees with what they already believe. Some scholars, like Sunstein (2009), warned about the emergence of "echo chambers", where individuals mostly hear opinions that match their own. Studies revealed that, in controlled experiments, people tend to pick news articles from sources that align with their political views (Garrett, 2009; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Furthermore, tools like search engines, news aggregators, and social networks are now customising content using machine-learning models (Agichtein et al., 2006; Das et al., 2007; Hannak et al., 2013). This can lead to formation of "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011), where algorithms unintentionally reinforce ideological separation by suggesting content that individuals are likely to agree with.

The Brexit referendum and the US Presidential elections of 2016 fuelled the concerns surrounding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles (Spohr, 2017). This points towards raising concerns over whether there are biases embedded in the algorithms that drive search engines and social media. Some studies in the UK reported that about six to eight out of every hundred people stay in online news bubbles (Kitchens et al., 2020). These bubbles are like closed spaces where news and opinions are repeated, making them seem more



important and keeping out different viewpoints. These studies show that the forms of algorithmic selection offered by search engines, applications, and other digital platforms often lead to the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles (Arguedas et al., n.d.).

The increasing dependence on social media as a source of news (Pew Research Centre, 2018), along with the likely division of information caused by echo chambers and filter bubbles, is a matter of great concern, particularly considering that open political discourse and exposure to differing perspectives are crucial for a healthy democracy. People are exposed to misleading information through platforms like Facebook and YouTube, which contain content without an editorial process that screens out misleading information (Fourney et al., 2017; Guess et al., 2017; Lazer et al., 2017). Social networks can serve as “polarisation machines” by reinforcing and validating pre-existing opinions (Sunstein, 2009). Critical elements of the process of polarisation include the integration of new knowledge and confirmation from like-minded individuals within a social network (Sunstein, 2009). According to *Varieties of Democracy* (Coppedge et al., 2019) and Pew Research Centre, societal polarisation has increased over the past few decades in the majority of countries (Pew Research Centre, 2014). Mainstream media in India reported that the turmoil in the wake of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 in the country and the subsequent religious polarisation were fueled by the drastic use of social media for spreading misinformed videos and online hate speeches (The Hindu, 2020).

However, certain scholars contend that echo chambers are not a reality (Bruns, 2017; Garrett, 2009). In this regard, Benkler (2006) and other scholars have suggested that more options and social connections result in people encountering a wider range of ideas, moving them away from narrow consumption habits (Goel et al., 2012; Obendorf et al., 2007). Therefore, there is a necessity to delve deeper into the mechanisms behind polarisation in individuals’ opinions in the context of social media usage.

II. Literature Review

Creation of Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles through Social Media Algorithms

Social media algorithms are complex computational processes that are used by social media platforms to determine the content that users see in their feeds or search results. These algorithms analyse various factors, such as user engagement,

relevance, recency, and personalization, to deliver content that is most likely to be interesting or relevant to the users (Zhang, 2021). These algorithms are constantly evolving because social media platforms adjust their algorithms to improve users’ experiences, promote relevant content, and achieve their business objectives. However, this streamlined presentation of information can potentially limit users exposure to diverse viewpoints, leading to a narrowed understanding of the world. Over Reliance on personalised content may impede societal communication, hinder innovative thinking, and foster phenomena known as echo chambers and filter bubbles (Zhang, 2021).

Echo Chambers

Jamieson and Cappella, in their book *Echo Chamber*, defined it as “a bounded, enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered within it and insulate them from rebuttal” (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Broadly, the insulation part refers to the lack of cross-cutting exposure (for instance, people on the right will not come across centrist or leftwing perspectives that challenge their pre-existing views), while the magnification part can be said to be the preponderance of information that is attitude-consistent (for example, people on the left looking for information that confirms their pre-existing views). Within this closed environment, certain perspectives are continually reiterated, often in exaggerated or distorted forms, leading individuals to perceive these distorted views as absolute truth. This reinforces information or ideas within a closed loop. Moreover, it is argued that echo chamber members share collective beliefs, which contribute to their scepticism of those outside their circle (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Sunstein (2009) similarly contends that echo chambers symbolise situations in which group members prefer insulated information bubbles, relying on each other for validation of new information and interactions within their community. This leads to the reinforcement of extreme opinions and information.

The *cognitive dissonance theory* propounded by Leon Festinger in 1957, offers explanation for the genesis of the propensity for selective exposure, which is the cause behind the creation of online bubbles. According to this notion, people aim for internal consistency in their ideas and beliefs because psychological discomfort arises from dissonance or inconsistency. As a result, a person will make an effort to steer clear of circumstances and information that could exacerbate



their dissonance and instead go for ones that are harmonious (Cinelli et al., 2020).

Filter Bubble

Internet activist Eli Pariser introduced the concept of “filter bubbles” in his book *“The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You,”* published in 2011. He explains that a filter bubble is formed by personalization algorithms, creating an environment where individuals are exposed only to familiar information and opinions (Pariser, 2011). These algorithms selectively provide content tailored to a user’s past behaviour, preferences, and demographic profile. Pariser warns that these filter bubbles restrict exposure to new ideas, topics, and crucial information, which undermines the democratic process and contributes to heightened polarisation (Pariser, 2011).

As social media becomes increasingly central to how people access news and information, the impact of ideological polarisation on consuming information becomes more evident (Dylko et al., 2017; Stroud, 2010).

Political Polarisation Due to Online Bubbles

Political polarisation

The concept of ‘political polarisation’ dates back to Sartori’s definition published in 1976. According to Sartori (1976), polarisation occurs when there is a significant ideological divide, as opposed to ideological proximity because political groups perceive themselves as mutually exclusive or unable to collaborate (González, 2021). Political polarisation, as Sartori (1976) sees it, revolves around the degree of disagreement on policy choices and political preferences, spanning from the left to the right on a pre-existing continuum of alternatives. Under this definition, a group becomes polarised when its members’ preferences sharply split into two distinct modes, causing the emerging groups to drift apart.

Social media has emerged as a crucial battleground in contemporary politics (Farkas & Schou, 2018). According to Giroux (2021), social media’s absence of traditional gatekeepers like journalists allows propaganda and misinformation to spread with ease, often presenting a seemingly benign facade. Within this landscape of misinformation, many individuals are swayed to support divisive and potentially violent causes. However, contemporary polarisation is not limited solely to clashes between political parties but includes multiple factors, social media being one.

Influence of Online Bubbles

Healthy democracies flourish when there is widespread public engagement and when independent news outlets and media platforms hold powerful entities responsible and provide avenues for diverse opinions to be expressed. Previous studies have shown that individuals who curate their news feeds usually have strong political beliefs and are very active in political discussions online. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of online bubbles interacts with human tendencies towards familiarity and fluency biases (Rhodes, 2021). This means that the more people hear a particular story, the more familiar and comfortable it becomes to them. Consequently, they are more likely to accept it as true, even if it is entirely fabricated. While fact-checking tools may initially reduce the sharing of questionable content, they often fail to correct long-term misinformation.

The consumption of radical social media content in the Indian context has increased with an increase in hate speeches and crimes against minorities reported in popular media (The Hindu, 2023). Also, it is feasible that users who identify as members of minority groups have more direct and indirect experiences with oppression in life, which makes them more likely than users in the majority to believe and connect with polarised social media content. Compared to majority citizens, members of minorities typically have firsthand knowledge of prejudice and were raised with tales of it (Pew Research Centre, 2016). The Popular media has emphasised hate crimes, hate speeches, and repressive government actions against minorities in India as well (Jayanth, 2022).

The Indian Scenario: Rising social media usage and political discourse

The 2019 general election in India was termed as ‘social media election’ owing to the unparalleled utilisation of social media platforms by politicians and political parties. This was an endeavour to connect directly with the public (Lakshane, 2024).

The digital revolution has extended internet access to rural areas in India. The influence of social media on elections, as observed in 2014 and 2019, has undergone a significant transformation in the coming days due to the integration of AI. Social media platforms now utilise AI-driven algorithms to enhance user engagement. This facilitates political parties in discerning voter preferences, tailoring messages, and refining campaign strategies through extensive data analysis. The phenomenon intensifies with the formation of echo chambers (Lakshane,



2024). Utilising AI, deepfake videos disseminate false information, potentially swaying voter opinions. Reports suggest that during the 2024 elections, political parties circulated deepfake media via platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Notably, one such video featured a leader from Telangana urging support for a rival party (Aljazeera, 2024). A recent inquiry conducted by Access Now and Global Witness revealed that YouTube authorised 48 ads in English, Hindi, and Telugu that contravened the platform's rules regarding advertising and misinformation related to elections (Global Witness, 2024).

Political parties enlist influencers on platforms like YouTube and Instagram to share highly localised and precisely targeted content aimed at specific demographics and interests. This strategy is designed to connect with rural voters, influence swing voting behaviours, navigate crises, and ultimately bolster their hold on power. Influencers deliver a blend of direct and subtle messages, seamlessly interwoven with their personal views (Bansal, 2024).

Pal and colleagues examined a dataset comprising 6.9 million tweets sourced from the profiles of 17,261 politicians representing 127 political parties in India (EPW, 2019). Their aim was to identify trends associated with the 2019 elections. Their analysis revealed significant engagement from all major political parties on Twitter, a platform subsequently rebranded as X (EPW, 2019). The ruling party engaged with voters by sending them personalised 'Letters from the Prime Minister' via WhatsApp, leveraging its massive user base of over 500 million active monthly users in India. These letters highlight the achievements of the government and solicit feedback from voters. With India boasting over 800 million internet users and leading in Instagram and YouTube usage globally, the ruling party has collaborated with prominent influencers to amplify its political messaging (The Hindu, 2024). In another development, X (formerly Twitter) announced its compliance with a voluntary code of ethics for social media platforms two days prior to Phase 1 of the 2024 elections, acting upon takedown requests from the Election Commission of India (ECI) (The Hindu, 2024).

Numerous efforts were taken to keep a check on online activities and their influence on the political discourse. The Election Commission of India established a Social Media Cell with the aim to share information, advise and educate local authorities, enhance social media engagement for the public, monitor ongoing social media activities,

news, and ads, identify sensitive content, and address complaints regarding inappropriate content (Bansal, 2024). Prior to the 2019 election, major social media platforms such as Google, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, ShareChat, and TikTok, among others, agreed to adhere to a 'voluntary code of ethics' presented to the ECI (Jaishwal et al., 2018). These companies pledged to raise awareness about elections through educational campaigns, establish a dedicated channel to address grievances promptly, swiftly respond to reported violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), and ensure certification of all political advertisements on their platforms. NDTV, an Indian news channel, conducted an analysis of hate speech and "dog-whistling" content (coded messages catering to caste and religious biases), revealing a nearly 500 percent increase in divisive rhetoric by senior politicians over the past four years (Jaishwal et al., 2018). Additionally, the Observer Research Foundation examined hate speech on social media and found that religious and cultural practices served as the explicit basis for hate comments, primarily targeting the Muslim community (Mirchandani, 2018).

Despite such efforts, social media's democratisation as a political communication platform in India, has not evolved into a professionalised information-sharing platform. For example, according to a report by the Oxford Internet Institute, India is among the top 10 countries engaging in organised social media manipulation (Bradshaw and Howard, 2018).

Research Gap

Based on the extensive literature review done above, it was found that there is a dearth of research studies conducted in the Indian context systematically examining the role of social media algorithms in the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles and how they are contributing to political polarisation. Therefore, it is felt necessary to explore whether exposure to like-minded political content can potentially polarise people or strengthen the attitudes of people with existing partisan attitudes. The goal of this study is to fill in this gap in research by exploring the influence of social media algorithms in shaping political discourse and opinion formation among the Indian masses.

Research Question

How do echo chambers and filter bubbles created by social media algorithms impact political polarisation among the Indian masses?

Research Objectives

The following objectives were framed, taking into consideration the research question of the study:



- To investigate the patterns of social media usage among the Indian masses and its relation to their exposure to political contents
- To understand how diverse or uniform political contents influence political discourse and opinion formation
- To understand the mechanisms through which echo chambers and filter bubbles contribute to the reinforcement of pre-existing political beliefs and attitudes
- To assess the impact of digital echo chambers and filter bubbles in shaping the political opinions within the Indian populace.

III. Research Methodology

Research Design

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, keeping in mind the nature of the study. A mixed-methods approach encompasses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research (Tzagkarakis & Kritas, 2023). The population of the study was the Indian populace, hailing from various corners of the country. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the samples (participants) needed for the study, whose ages were between 17 and 46. The total number of samples was 148. To collect the data, a self-constructed questionnaire via a Google form was circulated among the samples, which consisted of 29 items. The items were related to the participant's demographic characteristics, patterns of social

media usage and its relation to exposure to political contents, as well as varied or uniform political perspectives affecting their levels of political polarisation. The data were collected throughout the months of October, November and December 2025. The quantitative data were analysed with the help of a percentage method—a quantitative data analysis technique—whereas the qualitative data were analysed utilising the thematic analysis method—a qualitative data analysis technique.

Ethical Considerations

During data collection, the researcher assured participants that their identities would remain confidential and that their responses would be used solely for research purposes.

IV. Findings

Results Derived from the Quantitative Data

The quantitative data in this study were obtained from the multiple-choice questions given in the questionnaire. Analysis of these data revealed several emergent themes, which are examined in detail below.

Demographic Information of the Participants

The demographic information considered in this study was confined to participants' age, gender, employment status, and educational qualifications. The responses provided by the participants were analysed using the percentage method. The results are given in the table below.

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Less than 18 years	4	2.7%
19–25 years	124	83.8%
26–30 years	14	9.4%
More than 31 years	6	4.1%
Gender		
Female	98	66.2%
Male	50	33.8%



<i>Employment Status</i>		
Employed	14	9.4%
Unemployed	16	10.8%
Student	115	77.7%
Research Scholar	2	1.3%
Businessman	1	0.6%
<i>Educational Qualifications</i>		
High School or Higher Secondary	12	8.1%
Bachelor's Degree	86	58.1%
Master's Degree	41	27.7%
PhD or Higher	9	6.1%

Table-1: Demographic information of the participants

According to the data provided in Table 1, the study predominantly comprised female participants, accounting for 66.2%, while male participants constituted 33.8%. The majority of respondents fell within the age group of 19 to 25 years. Furthermore, a significant portion of the sample, approximately 77%, identified themselves as students. Among these, a noteworthy proportion comprised young individuals engaged in graduate and postgraduate studies.

Patterns of Social Media Usage

The investigation into social media usage patterns involves a comprehensive examination of

the manner in which individuals interact with various social media platforms. This thematic inquiry encompasses four distinct dimensions: the primary sources from which individuals derive news content, the duration of time spent engaging with social media platforms, the frequency of accessing online news content, and the nature of interactions with different types of content available on these platforms. Responses were analysed using percentages to understand preferences and behaviours. Results are depicted below in the bar diagrams, showing the distribution of responses across these dimensions.

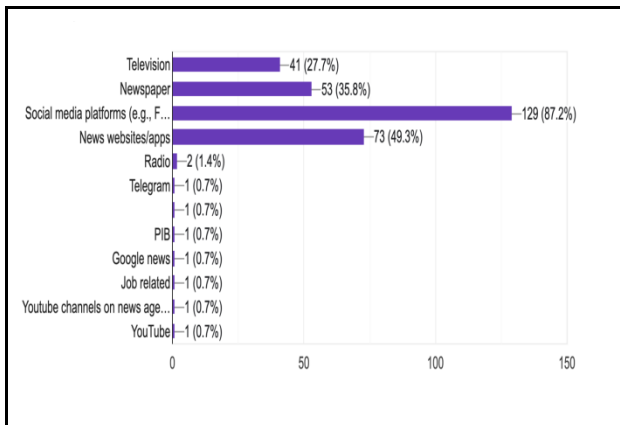


Diagram-1: Major sources of news consumption

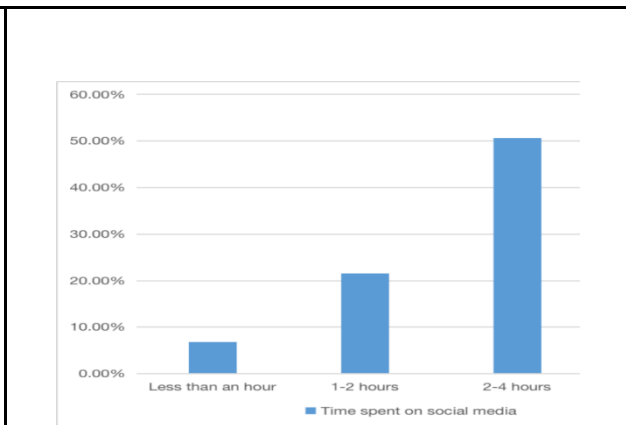


Diagram-2: Time spent on social media platforms

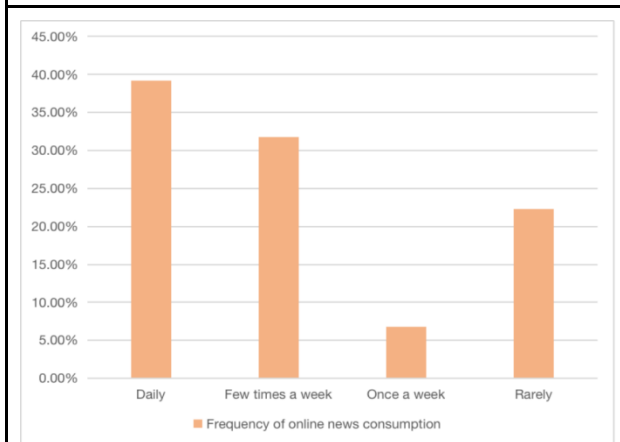


Diagram-3: Frequency of online news consumption

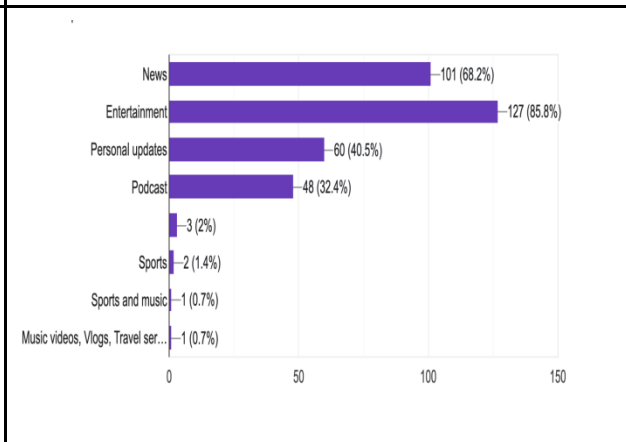


Diagram-4: Types of content engagement

Figure-1: Patterns of social media usage

Figure 1 depicts the social media usage patterns among participants, based on the analysis of four broad questions. Initially, the author examines primary news sources (diagram 1), revealing that a significant majority, comprising 87.2% of participants, obtain news from social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., while only a minority resort to traditional sources like television (27.7%) and newspapers (35.8%). Subsequently, attention is given to participants' time allocation on social media platforms (as illustrated in diagram 2), with the majority indicating a usage duration ranging from 2 to 4 hours. The inquiry into the frequency of online news consumption (diagram 3) presents participants with four options: (A) daily, (B) a few times a week,

(C) once a week, and (D) rarely, with a notable preference for option A, daily. Lastly, the investigation into types of content engagement reveals a predominant interest in entertainment content (85.8%), followed by news updates (68.2%).

Political Contents in Social Media

Within the overarching theme of political engagement on social media, three distinct sub-themes were investigated: the frequency of encountering political content, awareness of content authenticity, and exposure to diverse/uniform political viewpoints. The responses pertaining to these sub-themes were analysed using the percentage method. The results are shown in the pie diagrams given below.

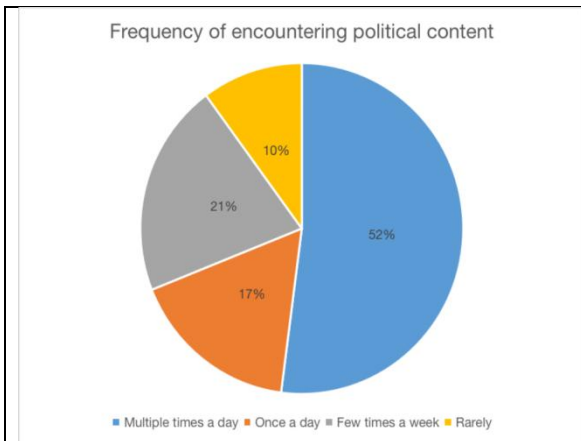


Diagram-5: Frequency of encountering political content

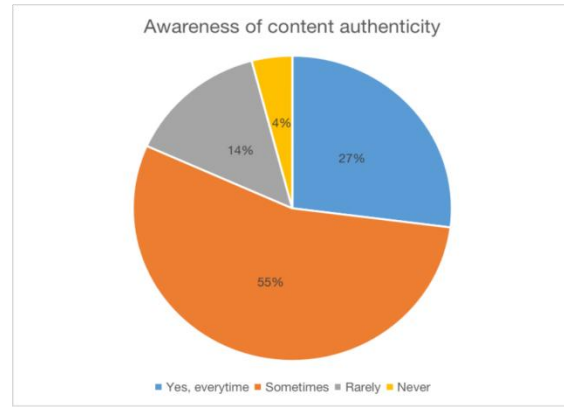


Diagram-6: Awareness of content authenticity

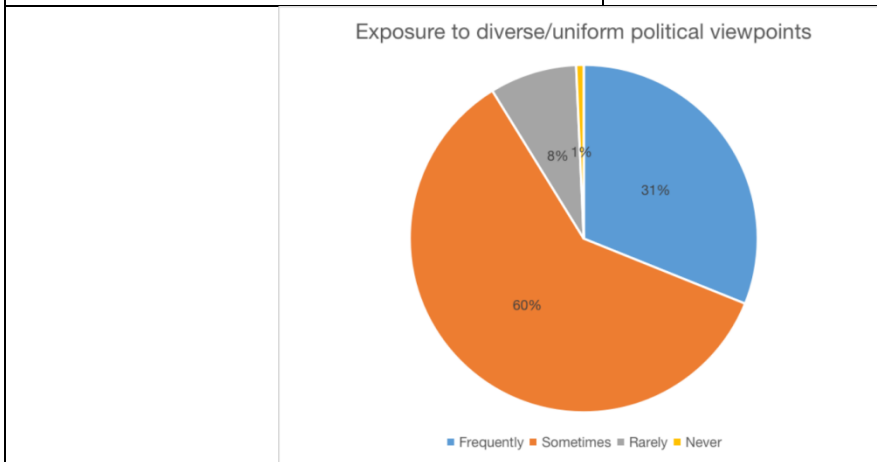


Diagram-7: Exposure to diverse/uniform political viewpoints

Figure-2: Political contents in social media

Figure 2 illustrates the political content found on social media, analysing three main aspects. Firstly, it explores the frequency of encountering political content on social media (as shown in diagram 5), offering four choices: multiple times a day, once a day, a few times a week, and rarely. The majority (52%) indicated encountering political content multiple times a day. Secondly, it examines participants' awareness regarding the authenticity of information on social media (illustrated in diagram 6). The findings reveal that most participants (54.7%) sometimes check the authenticity, while only 27% reported checking it every time they come across online information. The subsequent section investigates the extent to which social media platforms expose users to diverse or uniform content. Participants were asked "how often they encounter political opinions on social media that

differ from their own", with four response options: frequently, sometimes, rarely, and never (diagram 7). The majority (60.1%) indicated encountering such opinions sometimes, while 31.1% reported never encountering them.

Personalisation and Online Bubbles

Within this theme, the researcher included three sub-themes derived from participants' responses to specific multiple-choice questions in the questionnaire. These sub-themes encompassed the personalisation of online content, alignment with pre-existing viewpoints, and the level of participants' engagement with political content that contradicts their existing beliefs. The responses related to these sub-topics were examined using the percentage technique. The outcomes are illustrated below.

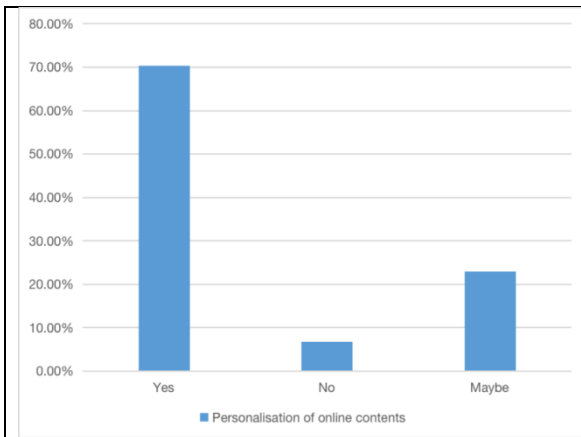


Diagram-8: Personalisation of online contents

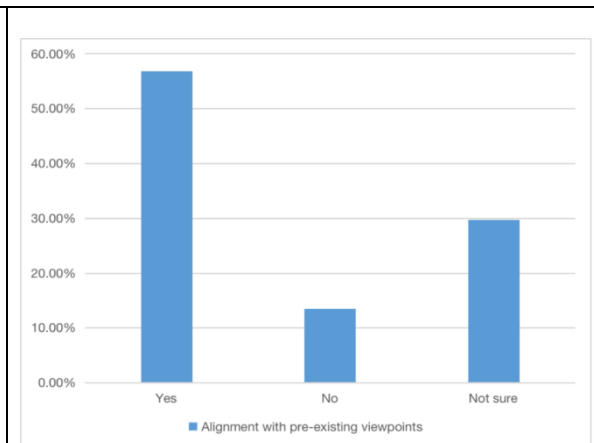


Diagram-9: Alignment with pre-existing viewpoints

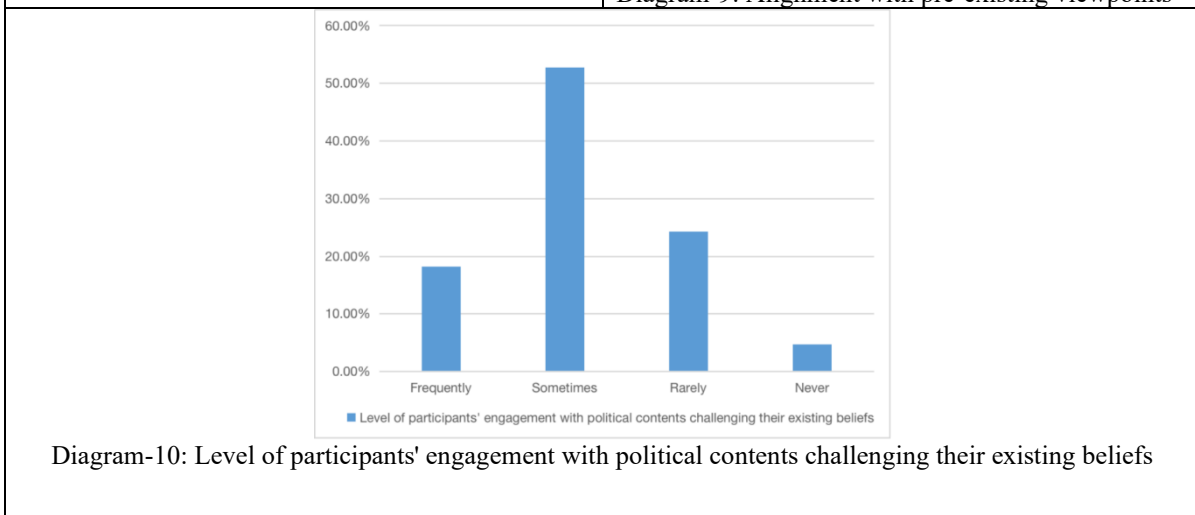


Diagram-10: Level of participants' engagement with political contents challenging their existing beliefs

Figure-3: Personalisation and online bubbles

Figure 3 depicts the extent of personalisation carried out by social media platforms and the perceptions of online bubbles among participants. When queried about their belief in algorithm-driven personalization (see diagram 8), a majority responded affirmatively (70.3%). Subsequently, the author observes the correspondence of content displayed on social media platforms with preconceived notions (see diagram 9). Here, 56.8% responded positively, while 29.7% of participants expressed uncertainty. Moving forward, the author inquires about participants' involvement in discussions that challenge their existing beliefs (see diagram 10), revealing that a significant portion, i.e., 52.7%, participate in such discussions 'sometimes,' whereas 24.3% do so 'rarely.'

Shifts in Opinions and Political Polarisation due to Social Media

This thematic framework was formulated through the analysis of participant responses to four specific multiple-choice questions featured in the questionnaire. These questions generated four distinct sub-themes, namely: the recognition of political polarisation as a notable societal concern; the assessment of political polarisation levels among the youth demographic; the examination of perspective shifts resulting from exposure to conflicting content; and the exploration of the impact of echo chambers and filter bubbles on political polarisation. The findings corresponding to each sub-theme are depicted below, visually represented through pie charts for clarity and comprehensibility.

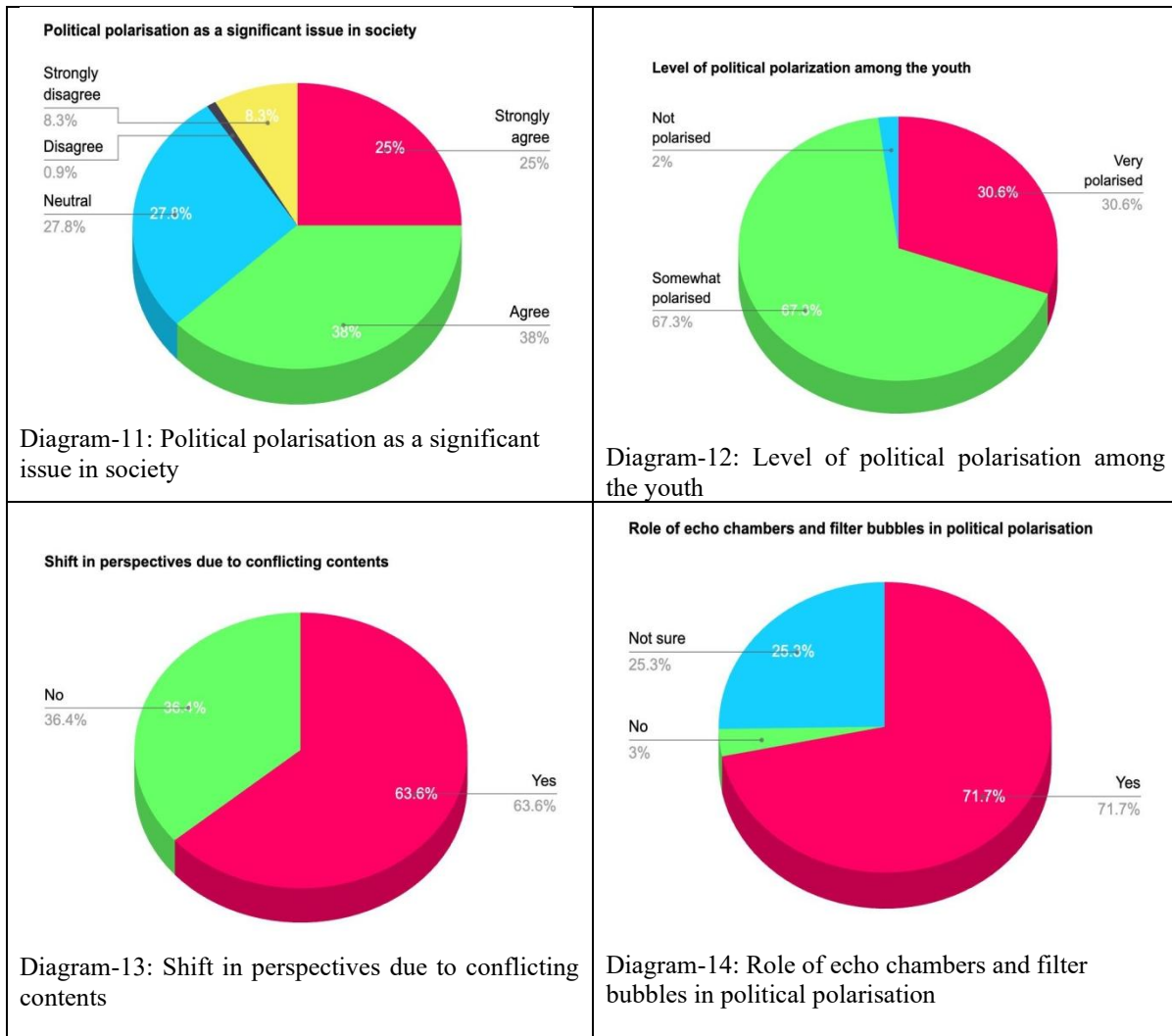


Figure-4: Shifts in opinions and political polarisation due to social media

Figure 4 illustrates shift in opinion and the political polarisation among individuals as a result of their use of social media. When queried about the significance of political polarisation in our nation (diagram 11), the majority concurred (41.2%), while 30.4% remained neutral. Moving on to examining polarisation among young people (diagram 12), respondents were presented with three options: very polarised, somewhat polarised, and not polarised. 66.9% indicated that Indian youths are somewhat polarised, and 30.4% believed they are very polarised. The subsequent inquiry investigated whether participants had altered their perspectives due to exposure to conflicting viewpoints (diagram 13), with 63.5% affirming this. Regarding the role of echo chambers and filter bubbles in fostering political polarisation (diagram 14), the majority

(71.6%) acknowledged their contribution, while 25% expressed uncertainty.

Results Derived from the Qualitative Data

The qualitative data in this study were acquired from the open-ended questions provided in the questionnaire. Subsequent analysis of this data uncovered numerous emergent themes, each of which is subjected to detailed examination in the following sections.

The Importance of Engaging with Diverse Perspectives on Social Media

The findings reveal the critical importance of engaging with diverse perspectives on social media platforms. The majority of participants expressed a strong belief in the necessity of such engagement, emphasising its role in broadening one's



understanding of the multidimensional world and countering potential ideological monopolisation by media outlets. Participants highlighted the invaluable benefits of exposure to conflicting viewpoints, including the development of analytical and critical thinking skills, the cultivation of empathy and well-rounded opinions, and the enhancement of decision-making abilities. Moreover, they emphasised the role of engagement with differing perspectives in fostering a culture of acceptance and deliberation essential for the functioning of a healthy democratic society. Overall, the findings highlight the transformative potential of engaging with diverse perspectives on social media in shaping informed, empathetic, and pluralistic societies.

Changes in Political Perspectives due to Social Media Usage

The findings from participant responses shed light on the complex relationship between social media usage and changes in political views. While the majority of participants acknowledged that their perspectives on political issues sometimes shift as a result of using social media, the reasons behind these changes varied among individuals. Some participants demonstrated a conscientious approach to consuming political content, emphasising the importance of focusing on factual information and critically evaluating the content they encounter. Others highlighted the value of social media in providing daily updates on political issues, which often leads to a broadening of their understanding and a subsequent change in viewpoints. However, concerns were raised about the one-sided nature of social media, with participants noting a lack of proper analysis and an overemphasis on polarisation, particularly among the younger demographic. Some participants expressed negative sentiments about social media, describing it as muddling their minds and fostering negative emotions such as spite and hate. As a coping mechanism, they reported taking frequent breaks from social media platforms. Overall, these findings highlight the nuanced ways in which social media usage can impact political views, emphasising the importance of critical thinking and discernment in navigating the digital landscape.

Complex Interplay Between Social Media Use and Youth Decision-Making Processes

The findings from participant responses illuminate the intricate interplay between social media and the decision-making process among young people. While the majority acknowledged the

occasional influence of social media on decision-making, opinions diverged on the extent and nature of this influence. Some participants emphasised the significant role of social media as a powerful tool for capturing the attention of youth, suggesting its potential to sway decisions through the portrayal of certain content in a positive light while trolling others. However, concerns were raised about the potential negative impact of such content, with participants highlighting the risk of misinformation and manipulation, particularly in the context of political discourse. There was recognition of the dual impact of social media, with some participants acknowledging its potential to provide valuable information that shapes decisions, while others expressed concerns about young voters being misled by sugar coated promises and ideas from political parties, leading to a lack of appreciation for opposing viewpoints and contributing to political polarisation. The uncertainty persisted among some participants regarding the extent of social media's influence, with acknowledgment that while young people are influenced by social media content, they may still maintain a balanced and informed perspective on issues. Overall, the findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationship between social media and decision-making among young people, highlighting the need for critical thinking and discernment in navigating digital platforms.

V. Discussion

The discussion section of this research report delves into the multifaceted impact of social media algorithms and online bubbles on various aspects of individuals' political behaviours, as revealed by both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Beginning with the quantitative findings, the demographic information of the participants paints a picture of the study's sample, predominantly comprising young individuals, with a significant representation of females and students, particularly those engaged in graduate and postgraduate studies. This demographic composition underscores the relevance of the focus of the study on social media usage patterns among the Indian populace.

Moving on to the patterns of social media usage, the analysis unveils several noteworthy trends. Firstly, the study highlights the prevalence of social media platforms as primary sources of news consumption among participants, overshadowing traditional sources like television and newspapers (Walker & Matsa, 2021). This shift



towards digital platforms for news consumption underscores the evolving media landscape and its implications for information dissemination among youth. Additionally, the findings shed light on participants' time allocation on social media, frequency of online news consumption, and types of content engagement, revealing a significant interest in entertainment content alongside news updates.

Regarding political content on social media, the analysis reveals substantial exposure to political content among participants, with a majority encountering such content multiple times a day (Matthes, 2022). However, there appear to be varying levels of awareness regarding the authenticity of information, with a significant portion sometimes checking the authenticity of online information (Bhatt et al., 2018). Moreover, the findings suggest that while many participants encounter political opinions on social media that differ from their own (Intyaswati et al., 2021), a notable proportion rarely or never encounter such perspectives. This discrepancy in exposure to diverse viewpoints underscores the potential impact of algorithm-driven personalization and online bubbles in shaping individuals' information environments and contributing to political polarisation (Sunstein, 2002).

Transitioning to the qualitative findings, the discussion highlights the critical importance of engaging with diverse perspectives on social media platforms. Participants emphasised the role of such engagement in broadening their understanding of the world, developing critical thinking skills, and fostering a culture of acceptance and deliberation essential for a healthy democratic society (Lin & Kant, 2021). However, concerns were raised about the one-sided nature of social media, with participants noting the risk of misinformation and manipulation, particularly in political discourse. These findings underscore the need for critical thinking and discernment in navigating social media platforms to mitigate the potential negative impacts of algorithm-driven personalization and online bubbles (Pariser, 2011). Furthermore, the qualitative analysis delves into the complex relationship between social media usage and changes in political views among participants (Al-Odat et al., 2023). While many acknowledged the occasional influence of social media on their perspectives, opinions varied regarding the extent and nature of this influence. Some participants highlighted the value of social media in providing daily updates on political issues (Kaur & Kaur, 2013), while others expressed concerns about its one-sided nature and

potential negative impact on decision-making processes.

VI. Limitations of the Study

While the study contributes valuable insights into online search behaviour and political polarisation, it is crucial to acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, participants' self-assessment of concepts like filter bubbles and echo chambers may be biased, potentially impacting the accuracy of their understanding. Secondly, the sample size, limited to individuals from India, raises concerns about ecological fallacies, limiting the generalizability of the findings to the global population. Additionally, reliance on an internet-based questionnaire may attract specific demographics, particularly those with higher educational attainment, potentially biasing the results. Despite these, the research enriches the existing literature. Future studies should address these limitations for a comprehensive understanding.

VII. Conclusion

The present study underscores the significant role of social media algorithms in shaping echo chambers and filter bubbles that influence political behaviour among the Indian masses. The findings highlight the dominance of digital platforms as primary sources of news consumption and their substantial exposure to political content (Walker & Matsa, 2021). However, concerns arise regarding the impact of algorithm-driven personalization and online bubbles on information diversity and political polarisation. While participants emphasise the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives, challenges persist in navigating the one-sided nature of social media information. Critical engagement and media literacy are essential to address these challenges and promote a more informed and inclusive online discourse.

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