

## Persuasive Political Communication and Media Literacy: A critical study

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### Abstract

In the current global scenario, 'critical understanding of media' is also being seen as a helpful ability to live an excellent life in a democratic country. This critical understanding of media is related to 'media literacy' on which the basis of this research paper has been laid. According to the 'Office of Communication' of Britain, 'media literacy' or 'media literacy' refers to a person's access to media content, the ability to analyze that content, evaluate it and create messages. According to the report "Youth in India-2017" released by the National Statistical Commission of the Government of India, the youth population in India in the year 2011 was about 42 crores, 19 lakhs, which was estimated to reach about 47 crores, 94 lakhs in the year 2021. If seen in global proportions, a developing country like India has a large population of youth on which all the small and big political parties of the country have their eyes fixed. The present youth is not only important as a voter in the democracy of India, but it is also a large and active consumer group for multinational companies. In such a situation, not only political parties but also business companies have their eyes on these youth. It has been seen that such companies can go to any extent to pursue their interests, the loss of which may have to be borne by the youth of India. Not only this, but today's youth also can easily get trapped in the misleading trap of biased political communication or tempting promises made by political parties. Based on an in-depth literature review and survey, about 400 youths in the age group of 18 to 29 years were selected for the survey using purposive sampling. In which only technically aware youths studying in colleges, universities and coaching institutes of Patna, the capital of Bihar, were selected for the study. Also, this study included youths in the age group of 18 to 29 who were voting for the first time and those who had exercised their right to vote earlier.

Keywords: Media literacy, temptation, fake news, youth, political Communication.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Author Darren G. Lilleker writes in his book on the history of political communication that, "Political communication was often used when one had to oppose a rival with one's authority and power. Yet political communication in human history has always been one-sided, it was from top to bottom i.e. from the leader to the public." The author further writes that in the present times, the form of political communication has changed and now there is a trend of two-way communication in which media is playing a decisive role. After the advent of media, the role of 'political communication' has now become that of a catalyst. Modern democracy requires the response of citizens, and the continuous participation of citizens is at the centre of the debate of democracy. The importance of 'political communication' also increases in democracy because in democracy, citizens get 'freedom of expression' as an important right. This right also includes the right to obtain information, because without information availability, this civil right has no special meaning. Therefore, in India, the right to information has been given to the people in the year 2005 so that people can obtain information and use this right. In India, the 'media' derives power from the fundamental right of 'freedom of expression'. That is, most of the rights of the media derive their energy from this fundamental right, under which the media fulfils its purpose of information, education and entertainment and calls itself the watchdog of public interest. At present, the term 'media' is the name of a capable adjusted system in the communication process, which generally includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, advertisements, and now multimedia devices including computers with internet, smart phones and video games etc. Therefore, today 'critical understanding of media' is also being seen as a helpful ability to live an excellent life in a democratic country. This critical understanding of media is related to 'media literacy' on which the basis of this research paper has been laid.

### 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In any democratic country, political communication is done in accordance with the democratic process. Since in democracy, the 'people' are considered supreme and the youth population in India represents a large part of the same 'people', who are also active voters and on whom the foundation of any democracy rests. In this research

study, a framework has been prepared by targeting the 'youth', especially those youth who become eligible to vote for the first time in a general election, that is, those youth who cross the age limit of 18 years and are included in the electoral list for the first time. One of the major reasons behind targeting the youth is that the 'youth' often do something new and are digital friendly, that is, they assimilate new technologies and at the same time they are also active citizens and play a positive role in sustainable development work. According to psychologist Barker, "Youth is such a category, in whose age group the essential psychological characteristics and social needs are almost the same" (Barker, 2000). Based on an in-depth literature review and survey, the present research paper selected about 400 youths in the age group of 18 to 29 years for the survey using purposive sampling, in which only technically aware youths studying in colleges, universities and coaching institutes of Patna, the capital of Bihar, were selected for the study. Also, this study included youths in the age group of 18 to 29 who are voting for the first time and those who have exercised their right to vote earlier. In the targeted sample of this research, media nature or habit has been examined through a questionnaire prepared based on 'media literacy framework' through both closed and open-ended selected questions.

### **Theoretical Aspect of the Research**

The theoretical aspect of social media in political communication can also be understood as to why the importance of social media is increasing politically as compared to all other media today. Because through social media, the work of reaching out to opinion leaders is going on very well not only in urban areas but also in remote areas. For example, we can see that the emphasis of political parties on mediums like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube is based on a theory of mass communication. Which is known as 'Two Step Theory'. The opinion leaders being talked about in this theory are mostly active on social media today and mostly represent the youth.

### **Critical Analysis**

According to the UK's 'Office of Communication', 'media literacy' refers to a person's ability to access media content, analyse that content, evaluate it and create messages. Media literate people can understand and analyse all kinds of information received from TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, Internet, books, video games, music and media. According to UNESCO's 'Media and Information Literacy' guide, media literacy includes 'access to information for all, the basis of quality education and freedom of expression'. In this context, it can be assumed that without the ability of media and information literacy, active participation of youth in society and community is quite difficult and it is also difficult for such people to participate in a good and effective governance. Therefore, the ability of media literacy has been identified by UNESCO as 'an essential capability'. Professor W. James Potter of the University of California has described media literacy in his book as 'self-help' in this world full of messages, that is, a student can be able to protect himself from media messages through media literacy. He has said that we unknowingly or as a habit consume a lot of such media content which is not useful for us at all, we do many such tasks unknowingly, but if we pause and think about that task for a while, then we will never do that task. That is, media literacy saves someone from doing any work like a machine, through automation or without any awareness.

In the year 2018, a strategy has been made to ensure the rights of youth around the world in a high-level program of the United Nations and the 'Youth 2030 Strategy' was launched, whose goals and objectives are to create a world in which the human rights of all the youth are respected and they are empowered so much that they can fully use all their capabilities for their development. According to the electoral list released by the Election Commission of India in the year 2018, "There are more than 87 crore, 91 lakh (87,91,25,763) voters registered in India, out of which about 4.5 crore are youth who are going to vote for the first time in an election. 34 percent of the current youth population in India, that is, about fifty percent of the total number of voters in the country, is youth. This situation is likely to remain till the 2019 general election as well as the general elections of 2024 and 2029. According to the report titled 'Youth in India 2017', India has about 34% youth population and on the basis of this report, at present, people in the age group of 15 to 34 years are considered 'youth' in India. It is clear from this that there is a large population of youth in India on which all the small and big political parties of the country keep an eye. The goals and objectives of the United Nations' Youth 2030 Strategy' and the data of the Election Commission of India justify the targeting of youth in the presented research paper.

Almost all media channels and websites available on the current internet are always with the youth through smart phones and keep influencing their every decision in various ways by giving some suggestion or the other. This suggestion is given by many media even without asking, what to do and what not to do, what to read or watch, what to buy or wear, etc. That is, the current media is influencing the youth all the time through some medium or the other. Since it is a universally accepted knowledge that the influence of media is deep on most of the youth, it becomes necessary to find ways to avoid it. According to an American research agency 'Zenith', about 530 million people in India have smartphones, which is the second place in the world after China. In the year 2017 itself, India has become the second country in the world to use smartphones, leaving behind America.

At the same time, a huge increase has been registered in the consumption of mobile internet in India since 2017. Considering the actual situation of smartphone and internet consumption in India, 'media literacy' can be taken as a necessary measure.

Except for some awareness programs in India, no formal or informal education to develop 'media understanding' is given to the youth here till now. Today, the youth of India seem unable to protect themselves from the increasing habit of internet and social media and the rain of information by the media. Looking at the current national and international media scenario, the need for a comprehensive policy for 'media literacy' is being felt. Because today, with the help of internet or social media, allegations and counter-allegations of interference in the democratic process of a country are also being made in international politics, in such a situation, it is now considered necessary to develop some defense shield for the youth who are making full use of almost most of the internet-based platforms. In the world, 'media literacy' has been seen and understood as one such defense shield. The need for a protective shield like media literacy is further strengthened when the communication system of political parties in India is analyzed. From this analysis, we find that almost all political parties, youth.

Any political party, whether it is in power or opposition, if it succeeds in bringing this class to its side, can easily enjoy power in the present democratic election system. Therefore, all political parties make many promises and various kinds of temptations to the youth to join them, which include giving them free laptops, mobiles, tablets and even 'education loan without interest', because if the youth join them, then any political party can get majority on the basis of 'First Past the Post System' i.e. in any election, "the one who gets the most 'votes' wins". In an article on the website of Deshbandhu newspaper, Prabhakar Chaubey writes that "For the past few years, the general elections of the country have been made 'offers' instead of 'elections'. Whether it is assembly elections or Lok Sabha elections, there is a trend of presenting attractive offers before the elections. Just like before festivals, sales are held and offers of buy one, get one free are given, similarly before elections, political parties have started offering voters to vote and get this for free." Former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Akhilesh Yadav was in the news for distributing laptops to the youth, while former Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Dr. Raman Singh was in the news for distributing free smart phones. Also, it is clear from many research reports (KPMG-IMC, 2018) that the 'youth' are more active on the internet and social media. Therefore, it can be said that a large population of youth in India can be easy victims of anti-national forces, misleading information (fake news) spread by neighboring countries and tempting news inspired by political bias.

According to the 'Statista-2021' report, today India ranks first in using Facebook in the whole world with about 34 crore users. After the Cambridge Analytica data leak controversy of Facebook, this question is a subject of research that where are such multinational companies sharing the personal information of their users without anyone's approval or partial approval? At the same time, the allegations of influencing the political views of the youth on many social media have also been proved (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Not only this, Google has also been fined in India, America and France in a data privacy case. In such a situation, having a critical understanding of media among the youth of India will not only work as a filter, but will also save them from being a part of any political propaganda being run against India at the global level. According to the Oxford Handbook, political communication has been defined as "Political communication is the sharing of the functions of power among the public through symbols." Political communication is considered important in the role of society building because this is how the state and its citizens feel connected to each other. But today, if we analyse the political communication being done by the political parties of India in the context of 'political communication', it becomes clear that almost all the political parties try their best to get the youth on their side. Now, political parties prepare a special media and advertising strategy targeting the youth and now, along with the mainstream media, more and more youth can be targeted with the help of social media and internet advertising. At the same time, at the time of elections, they are also lured with free laptops, mobiles or tablets, so that more and more youth can be brought on their side. Most of the political parties make full use of media and advertising in this. In such a situation, if the youth of the country is not 'media literate', then they will easily be misled by any party. And if the youth is misled, then it is possible that the winning political party may not complete its work responsibly and may resort to effective political communication instead of working at the grassroots level to get the youth on its side. As many advantages there are of using any media, the possibility of its disadvantages cannot be ruled out either. The reality is that the lives of today's youth are being confused by the barrage of many types of media messages. The excessive availability of media messages can affect the decision-making ability of the youth, which can create a state of confusion in their minds regarding the messages. In such a state of confusion, many youths stand on the threshold of voting for the first time in the election process in the world's largest democracy, but do today's youth, confused by the bombardment or excess of media messages, have the ability to form a strong democratic government? This is a big question. Such questions become more serious when the Cambridge Analytica data leak controversy comes to the fore. It can be said that as long as we keep updating our personal information on social media without thinking, social sites like Facebook will use this data for their benefit. This is becoming a serious problem in developing countries

like India. One way to avoid this seems to be that if we make our youth aware of these facts even a little in advance, then no one will be able to deceive them easily.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

Based on the data obtained from the survey, it can be said that most of today's youth are interested in political communication because they cannot stop themselves from consuming news related to politics, especially news produced by political communication, which is specially produced for them. On the other hand, if we accept the average trust of youth on news related to politics, then most of today's youth (about 69%) trust the news related to politics. Most of today's youth trust the statements (political communication) given by politicians on any media medium. About 48 percent of the youth trust the statements given by politicians on media a little bit', while about 05 percent of the youth trust the statements given by politicians on media lot' and about 39 percent of the youth 'do not trust' the statements given on media at all'. Therefore, it can be said that most of the youth (53%) trust the statements given by politicians on media. At the same time, about 40 percent of the youth trust the promises and announcements of political parties.

The analysis of the data obtained from the survey also makes it clear that the youth trust 'a lot' of the statements made by politicians on media. This makes it clear that a large section of the youth is being influenced by 'political communication'. At the same time, the analysis of the data also makes it clear that about 40 percent of the youth trust the promises of political parties to provide "government jobs and employment". Therefore, it can be said that the youth who trusted the promises of political parties to provide "government jobs and employment" can be easily influenced by political communication, that is, such youth can be easy victims of political temptations. The analysis of the data also makes it clear that social media is being used the most by the youth (about 55 percent) as a primary source to know any news. At the same time, the main medium used by today's youth to understand any "burning issue or problem" and form their opinion on it has also become 'social media'.

Therefore, the importance of media literacy increases for most of today's youth, who are unaware of the dangers of social media, because as today's youth play the dual role of content creator and consumer on social media, it is expected of them that they should at least be familiar with media literacy, otherwise the possibility of spreading misleading and biased communication by them cannot be ruled out. Most of the youth consider social media to be the most influential compared to all other mediums. At the same time, when social media is being considered influential by most of the youth, it generally means that at present, social media is having the most impact on them, this is the reason that any such news or video becomes viral in a few minutes, while misleading and biased political news also spreads faster on social media than other mediums.

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Author declares that all works are original and this manuscript has not been published in any other journal.

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