**Social Media: Blessing or a Curse?**

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Social media is a revolution that has changed our lives in many ways-both positive and negative. It has eased connectivity in our lives but complicated many other social issues. The new media platforms, which include Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram, have turned into powerful enablers of vast disinformation campaigns. Fewer efforts are seen on the part of administrators of these platforms in building honest and straightforward content moderation to control hate speech and disinformation on their platform against states, institutions and individuals.

A couple of days ago, news propped up that a 35 years old woman, mother of three children, committed suicide when a culprit uploaded and shared her doctored images on social media.

This is one such news reported on media, there are hundreds of stories about social media abuse, online financial and academic frauds, hacking, cyber-attacks and propaganda.

The UK daily reported that social media-related crimes have increased up to 780 per cent in the last few years.

Social media and digital tools are an integral part of our lives and are very productive. During the pandemic, social media was a helping tool for maintaining social support and getting updates related to the pandemic. The new culture of working from home and online delivery of commodities is again the kind of pandemic.

A psychologist, who practices in twin cities stated that 25 per cent of female patients have experienced of online harassment, in one way or the other.

Digital World has empowered the common man without making him a responsible citizen.

Human life is exposed. There is nothing private or hidden. This data of human activity is being stored and analysed by big machines for use in boosting sales of their brands based upon preferences deducted from analysed data. Our political preferences, likes and dislikes indicate our behaviour, which is picked up by machines through algorithms. These preferences are great to help political parties secure a win in elections.

Due to these ill practices of social media, the whole fabric of society is in danger.

A need has been felt in big democracies and most organized societies to have a set of rules in the cyber world, which are now influencing individuals, governments, education, trade, telecommunication, foreign relations and all aspects of life.

If social media is not managed through laws, it will lose its utility and wreak havoc on the world of information.

In the recent past, we have witnessed more chaos because of the exponential growth of social media manipulation of information through an organized infrastructure (by even states against adversaries) to create unrest among the public. It is a globe-spanning information conflict, fought by hundreds of millions of people across dozens of social media platforms. It is not only political battles but insurgencies, conflicts, and human rights being managed through digital platforms.

In an era of post-truth, audiences tend to believe information that appeals to their emotions and their personal beliefs, as opposed to seeking and accepting information regarded as factual and objective. People’s information consumption is guided by the emotional, dimension, as opposed to the cognitive dimension. This post-truth reality is one of the reasons for the proliferation of disinformation.

Political news remains a dominant discourse in the country. Subsequently, public discussions are mostly focused on political issues. Social media influencers mould public opinion through arguments, graphics, doctored pictures and videos and proliferate the same content world over. In any intense situation, the information cloud becomes so dense in a flash of time that it is difficult to make sense of anything. This complex situation is an “information disorder.”

The deliberate use of “disinformation” through assertion by political leaders is creating chaos and imbalance in society. Disinformation is the most harmful way of achieving end objectives. Fabricated news is floated on any social media platform through unknown sources, which is proliferated by troll farms. Factious hashtags (#) are made to malign individuals, organisations and political opponents.

Local television reported a few weeks ago that during July and August, 4.86 million tweets originated for twenty-one hashtags against the military. It was a smear campaign to influence public opinion against security forces.

Indian Chronicles, a global conspiracy, was exposed by EU Disinfo Lab in Brussels in 2020. It was a state-sponsored propaganda network established across the globe by India against states not in conformation with Indian policies. The network of fake websites, NGOs, and news agencies had been operating since 2005 and it continues. Indian chronicles have been termed the biggest promoter of organised fake news in the world.

Digital World has empowered the common man without making him a responsible citizen. This is where the problem starts for society and the state.

Disinformation is always aimed to malign other individuals or institutions.

An Islamabad-based think tank analysed the top five hashtags on the Pakistan Twitter panel every four hours from December 1, 2021, to April 20, 2022. The sample comprised 3356 hashtags. Results show that trends related to partisan politics were more than 87 per cent of all politics-related trends, followed by Judiciary related trends at nine per cent and civ-mil-related trends at four per cent.

Data analysis revealed that both major political parties dominated the twitter space with more than 300 Hashtags comprising mostly partisan politics. Supreme Court was the second most recurring hashtag indicating how the politicization of the judiciary and its ensuing criticisms had taken centre stage amidst the ongoing political turmoil. Research also found that Twitter activity was supported by Indian trolls.

Another study revealed that Indian Info-Ops focusing on Pakistan has gone through a strategic shift in the last year and has adopted a multi-faceted strategy. This entails promoting a soft image of Indian Military operations in Indian-occupied Kashmir on the one hand while concertedly amplifying the BLA’s and TTP’s activities within Pakistan on the other. The varying, techniques, mediums and narratives point towards increasingly sophisticated and dedicated teams carrying out the above with very specific goals and expertise.

Another study carried out by the digital media wing of the government reveals that Indian and Afghanistan intelligence agencies have been collaborating to defame Pakistan to influence the FATF authorities which ultimately resulted in placing Pakistan in grey and it continue.

There is no bigger threat to a state than societal chaos. The complexity of the situation requires stringent measures at the government level to regulate the use of social media within given norms.

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