# ROLE OFSOCIAL MEDIA IN TRANSFORMING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN INDIA; PROS AND CONS

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## ABSTRACT

*In the era of digitalization, social media platforms have emerged as a new way of communication and tool that facilitate fast interaction, share information, ideas, and contentand sometimes, emergedas a channel to create awareness on issues related to society or polity. Now days, people became habitual to use social media platformsto gather public opinion on different subjectsfor immediate attention from concerned authorities. In India too, the impact of digitalization process has affected every aspect of people's life. In terms of political context, being the largest democratic country in the world, digitalization process has affected election system in India which is mostly and traditionally based on campaigning and sloganeering. Election outcomes in India priorly was based on many socio-economic factors while advent ofdigital platforms making a change andtaking a forefront for political leaders and parties to be continuous in touch with the voters which helps them to understand voters' behaviour andrelated issues.Social Media platforms are providing information and creating awareness to concerned government authorities, political parties, and leaders to read the mindset of common public.On the contrary, voters are alsogettinginformation and can able to make judgment about the abilities of their representative in a better way. However, hijackingof important issues and misinformation including hegemonic use of digital platforms can mislead the voters and citizens. This study is trying to examine the role of social media platforms in election outcomes in India. Secondly, role of social media in creating political, social and economic awareness and sensitisationregarding policies and laws in India. In last part, this paper will study challenges social media can create to spread misinformation or the misuse of these platform by political leaders and parties.*

*KEYWORDS: digital, platform, communication, party, information*

## INTRODUCTION:

Technological revolution across the globe has changed the way of communication between individuals creating a new platform to share, publicise, share information in virtual mode as it is more convenient,fast, easier and cost free.Examining the role IT has played in every aspect of human life, visionary Canadian philosopher, regarded as the father of media studies and father of electronic age, Herbert Marshall McLuhan first coined the term "Global Village" in his book "The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man" published in 1962to describe the phenomenon of the entire world which is becoming more interconnected and transformedinto village like areas, after the advancementof information technology throughout the world.It designated towards a global coexistence changed by transnational commerce, migration and culture.Focusing on the future role Media in "Global Village", MacLuhandeveloped the famous phrase"Medium is the message".His study of media theory examined the role of media in understanding human nature. His book "Understanding Media, The Extensions of Man" introduced the usage of terms "media"into daily practicealong with the concept of "Global Village" and "Age of Information".It indicates the regular production and consumption of media, images and content in the age of globalisationby every corner of the globe. It examined the importance and effect of media on human life (McLuhan, 1962). In initial days, the invention of computer with internet facilities was dominantly used in official purposeonly. For individual purpose, it was also considered luxury having limited use, however the rise of cell phones with cheap internet connectivity created unprecedented change.According toTaprial and Kanwar accessibility, speed, interactivity, longevity, volatility, unlimited reach are some characteristics that further the global popularity of social media (Taprial and Kanwar, 2012).Criticisingtheexpansion and domination of digital technology and its global reach and use, Neil Postman criticised thedigital technologyfor replacing the traditional socio-cultural communication between people.In one of his most influential works, "Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business", Postman argued that technology which uses visual imaginary would lead reduction of information, news politics including other serious topics to entertainment and he specifically worried about television taking over and destroying the rational and serious public conversion (Postman, 1985). Hence, two contrasted perspectivesplayed key consideration among thinkers and theorists on the role and impact of digitalisationon human life post-globalisationled revolutionary changesincluding social media in 21st century as a platform and tool to help people of all ages to connect, express, create and exchange their ideas and thoughts widely.

This paper tries to examine the role of "Social Media" which is an important adjacentfacetwideningthe human life through thedigital platforms has emerged as aemerging as a most recentadvertisement instrument for electoral

gain by the political leaders and parties to connect, influence and spread their vision.Similarto global trend, Indian people are also extensively using social media platforms in their everyday life for interaction, share information, discuss and debate. WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTubeetc. are somemajor social media platforms emerged out of the expansion of Information and Communication technology which has made a revolutionary multi-facetedstructural change in the direction of connecting people all around the world. Overgrowing importance and popularity led the creation of new world of social cooperation and communication.It has affected synergic areas of social, politicaland economic. Simple in application, these sites are getting popularity to use as a medium of connection, business venture, entertainment, advertisement, marketing, information etc. It has expanded the areas while people are accustomed spending most of their time on these platforms to get news, information, entertain etc.

Having an open society with democratic governance, India,in 1991 announced structural economic reformation which openIndia's domestic market connecting with global market. In just two decades, India emerged as a fast-developing economy laggingbehindmany other developed economies. It could able to attract attention of developed economy to invest and became partners for business and development.The sustained economic growth and prosperity of India has made a mark at global levelbecoming world's 5th largest economy by nominal GDP (Gross Domestic Product)overtaking United Kingdomand 3rd largest by purchasing power parity (PPP). India ranked 139th by GDP nominal and 127th by GDP purchasing power parity on a per capita basis income (IMF Report 2023).

In the context of democratic governance,India, crossing 76th years of independence, adheres to the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights and freedomsfor its citizens whileadult franchise, freedom of press and expression are fundamental among others. Despite doubts and fears from many quarters, the framers of Indian constitution envisionedto establish a democratic, parliamentary, sovereign, republic political institutions along with political processes that serves the needs and preferences of public based on direct participation of citizens in the nation building process ensuring inclusion of all sections of society.There are two connotations in terms of understanding democracy as aprocedural form which explains the institutional set up such as regular election system, presidential or parliamentary form of government, adult franchise etc. based on electoral system to establish legitimate form of government in front of public or to recognised internationally. On the other hand, substantive or participatory form of democracy gives importance to the inclusiveness and participation of all section of society with diversity participate as citizen of the country in decision making. From the bothviewpoints, India successfully made a mark with its evolving democratic political institution and governance, deviatingfrom western understanding of democracy.India stands as the mother of democracy with world's largest,

most diverse country in terms of population, geography, region, religion, ethnicity, language etc. In latest report of 2022, conducted by Our World in Data, an international NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation),India ranks 108th in the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI)and 97th in the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) (https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/electoral-democracy-index).Indicators to measure democratic ethos is different for state to state.Notwithstanding,electoral system of India is continuously evolving and making changes to meet the demand of changing domestic and global environment.The latest revolution of digital communication which has been broadening areas,India is capturing the impetusranked second in terms of active internet user, according to the data from DataReportal (Fleck, 2023)

## MATERIAL AND METHODS:

This paper is trying to verify the general conception on the use of social media platforms in enhancing democracy in India from the perceived global concept.  The research was conducted based on secondary sources to examine usages of social media from global to national and local level. The study tries to examine the impact of social media on democratisation. Different research paper, news articles, government websites were studied to get the information. The data were focused on the earlier study conducted on similar and relevant topics which includes books, journals, newspaper articles, government reports etc. The study found that social media platforms have been playing an important role in the process of popularising political system, political slogans and created a revolutionary change in voting pattern of people in India. Candidates and political parties are extensively using these platforms to popularise their political agendas. On the other hand, citizens are getting benefited by the socio-economic and political information and awareness provided by the social media platforms at local, national and global level.

The scope and research on this topic is very fascinating due to the new rise of social media platforms across the globe and its obvious impact on every aspect of life. Participation in governance and decision making is an important aspect in enhancing democracy and social media is playing vital role as the game changer in many countries including India. However, limitation of the research is due to time constraint, availability of resources, primary data study etc.

## DISCUSSION:

The issuesrelated to economic development, prosperity, security is synchronisedwith the politicalstability of a country whichmostly found in a democratic country.The increaseof digital platforms users globallyshows the significance of social media platforms in terms of its role and impact on the democratic governance. According to

reports available in public domain which also includes study doneby Pew Research Centeron developed and developing economiesexamined that most of people across the globe reasons that social media is good for democracy to make easy communication between candidates and supporters.Accepting the constructive and destructive role played by social media, majoritypeople accepted the good role played by social media for enhancing democratic governance in a country. Information is a major source of strength for being a vigilant citizen which social media platforms fulfilling the needby keeping updated on domestic and international issues. Internet and social media are helping people to stay informed, connected about the current events in their own country or others. Events from Arab Spring to worldwide protest of #MeToo, hijab protest in Iran, social media have been become a platform of protest, social movement, election canvassing around the globe (Smith, Silver, John, Taylor and Jiang, 2019).

In India too, the influence of technology is immense and vast from conducting election process through EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) to campaigning by political parties and candidates. In this regard, this paper is examining the impact and role of digital platforms especially the social media in electoral politics in India. There are lots of research done by think tanks and NGOs at international level, which have found that people started spending more social time on screen to connect people rather than other means of communications. The social media platforms have taken plenty time of individual every day. The emergence of portable smartphones along with the cheap internet facility increasingly turned people towards these platforms to get everyday news and other information, at the same time express their opinion on the same. People easily get audience to listen, learn, express, discuss and debate. In a democratic country like India, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and related other grouping platforms has transformed the political sphere while both the representatives and voters very easily can connect with each other. It is helping to create transparency, efficiency and accountability. Lots of government runs apps to make fastest delivery of government services making a significant progress in India. Now a day, social media has become a platform mostly used by young generation to raise their voice on social, economic and political issues. On the other hand, it has been providing opportunity to political leaders and political parties to keep direct communication with voters easily and know the aspiration, grievances of the voters round the clock (Nath, 2020).
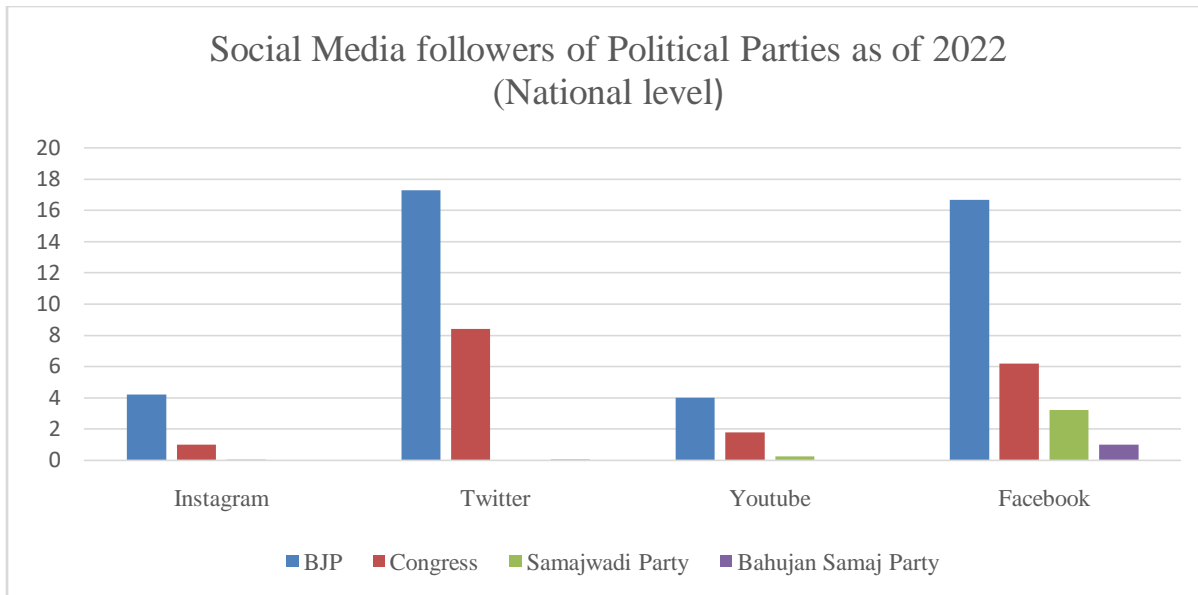
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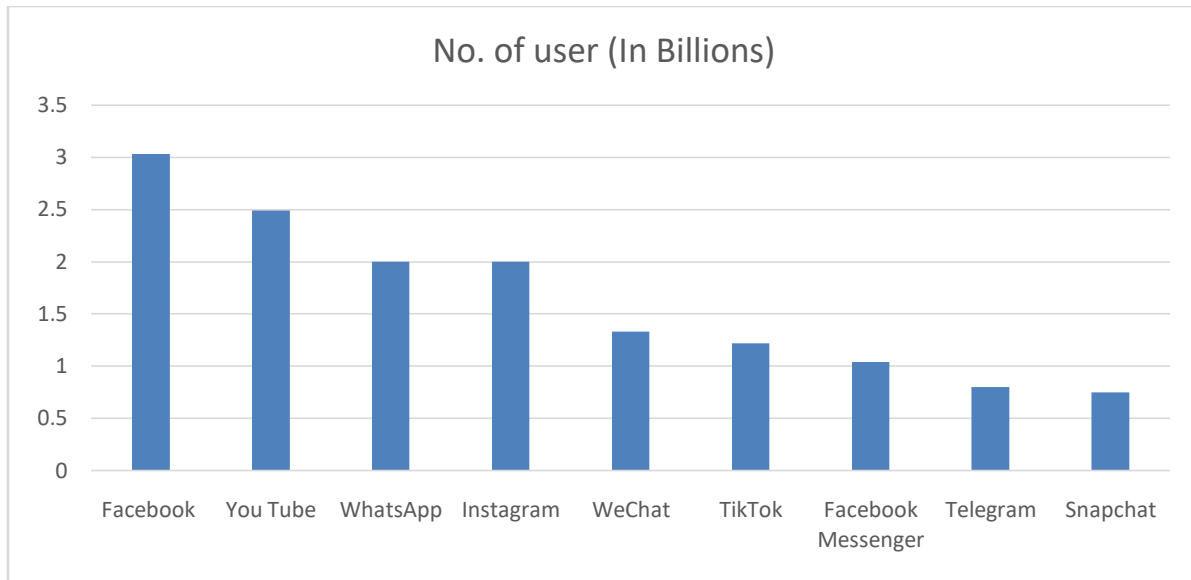
Graph 1

Source: DataReportal


**Social media:Pattern of user and its impact on voting behaviourin India:**

The dynamics of India's election result shows the rise of a new trend in the electoral politics with the penetration of digital platforms in the last two general election. Booth-wise profiling of voters based on religion, caste, community targeting the community and religious leaders to reach out those voters worked as medium between the candidates and representatives in traditional method of electoral politics which was more focused on local issues such as identity, ethnicity, rural and urban division. In addition, social media played decisive role in spreading information and political publicity by leaders and political parties. Due to easy access and popularity of these platform, leaders and parties started maximum utilization of these platform to connect with the voters(Jigeesh, 2019).

## Social Media followers of Political Parties as of 2022 (National level)



Graph 2

Source: BusinessToday.In (https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/politics/story/heres-how-social-media-digital-campaigns-are-shaping-2022-state-elections-318648-2022-01-11)

Social media platforms made easy for political parties to popularise their election slogans to get attention from public (graph 2).In both 2014 and 2019 general election, the technique used by main major party BJP was Modi's unique 'Chai pe Charcha' digital event. On the other hand, Congress tried to woo the voters with slogan like 'Chowkidar chorhai'. In return, BJP along with followers counting with 'Main bhi Chowkidar' profile addingin social media platforms especially in Facebook. The study report published by CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung found that in last general election,in terms of usage of social media platforms,compare to other political parties,BJP was far more ahead influencing the people to gain voters support (CSDS Report on social media and Political Behaviour, 2019). In India, as of latest data in 2023, there were 467 million active social media users as of 2022equating to 32.8 % of total population. Facebook has the largest share of social media user in India at approximately 55 % among all otherssocial media platforms which most of common people used and understand social media asFacebook.It is consistently leading since 2019 and followed by Instagram (36 %),Youtube, Twitter etc. Cellphonesare the primary digital screen for Indian customersto subscribe these platforms.The average screen time Indians spent on social media stands at nearly two and half hours a day (Basuroy, 2023)

Now a days, Political parties has been using social media platforms around the clock to defend their policies, laws made by them and to criticise opposition leaders and parties. In addition, it is used to showcase their achievement

through fascinating presentation to remain in power. Attacking opposition by renewed narration of historical facts, figure etc. became a new norm in social media circulated by political parties and their followers. Glorification of past events, narratives which majorly support the in power political parties is a new rise confusing common voters to reality. The political parties and candidates are deliberately using these platforms to gain support from voters during elections by showcasing their works and achievement towards the development of society and people, resultinga new rise in spending money by political parties on social media advertisement (according to CSDS report on the recent assembly election in Indian state_https://www.thehindu.com/data/bjps-social-media-spending-was-far-higher-than-congresss-data/article67640972.ece).The world's largest and India's richest political party,BJP is more active in social media and spends more money on social media platforms for promotion of the party.Digital strategies have become an important tool to organise political rallies and to popularise party manifestos.It is helping political parties and candidates in persuading the opinionand garnering the support of undecided votes.

A new trend also witnessed which is vital in changing electoral outcomes in Indian political process is the rising young voters and their participation in political process via social media to express their opinion, share experiences and to raise their voice including to support and oppose political leaders and parties etc. Presently, according to the report published by Ministry of Telecommunication, GoI (Government of India) India is holding world's second largest subscriber with 1.17 billion users till October 2022. As of 2023, active cellular mobile connections in India stands at 77.0 percent of total population and as of 2023 out of total population, India's internet penetration rate stood at 48.7 %. (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-india). Statista analyst, TanushreeBasuroy, who is an expert on cyberspace and India's data analysis, argued that India has been witnessed a steady increasing internet connectivity and active user mostly based on the urban areas (https://www.statista.com/chart/30029/internet-penetration-rate-in-india/). In her study in 2022, she claimed to found that 18 to 25 years old based in urban areas constituted the largest share in terms of social media users with 31 percent using six to nine platforms at a time (https://www.statista.com/statistics/1388571/india-social-media-usage-by-age-group).However, according to report published by Ministry of Telecommunication, GoI, rural subscriber in India is increasing very fast from 44% in March 2014 to 57.91 % in October 2022. GoI, under the Digital India campaign programmeemphasised on growth and expansion of internet and broadband connectivity to reach out marginalised and weaker sections leading an accelerated expansion in internet traffic, as a result, three-fold jump from 25.15 crore in March 2014 to 83.69 crore users in June 2022. The objective of Digital India programme is to establish better connectivity between citizens and government through e-services. To enhance accountability and efficiency of government programme and policies, India has digitalised its services including welfare schemes and social security benefits.

Additionally, Indian electoral politics gets a new dimension with the intense use of digital platforms especially social media. Post 2004, social media was taking over the major part of campaigning and sloganeering of leaders and political parties. It became the attractive, easy and cheap platform to campaign and spread the leaders and political parties' propaganda during election. It led structural change in the traditional election campaigning process. The AI (Artificial Intelligence) created attractive political campaigning started gaining popularity among voters which majorly changed the voting behaviour of voters and started taking considerable role in furthering social networking among citizens.
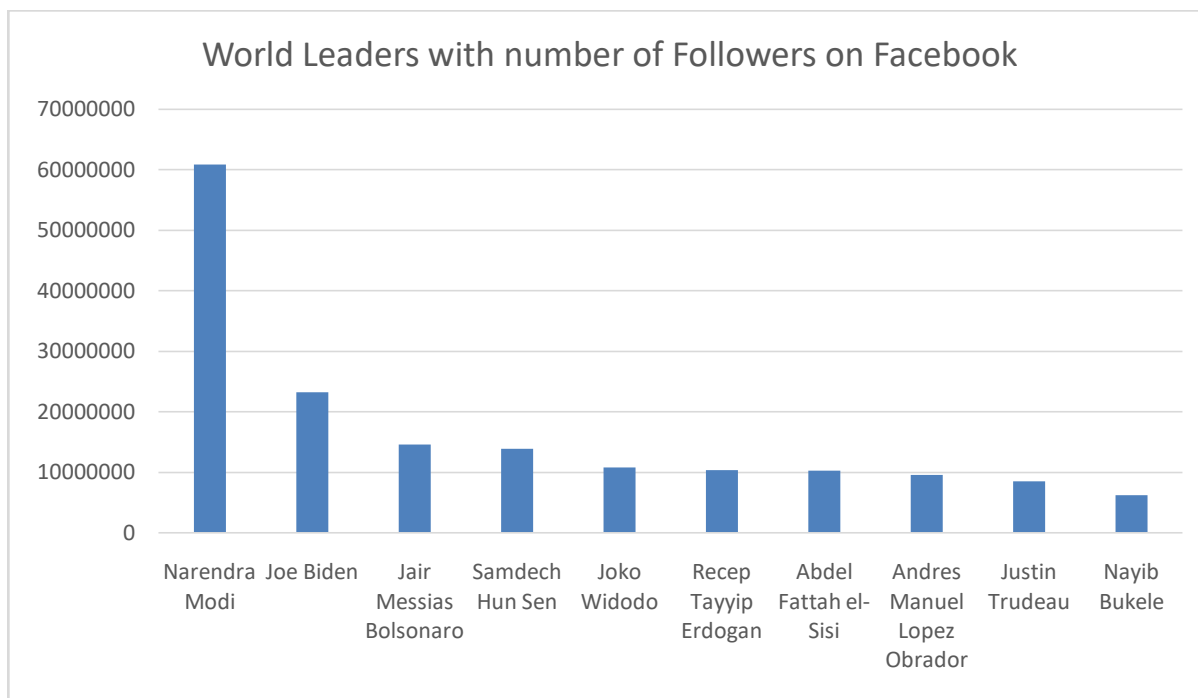


Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi emerged as the most popular and followed head of the state across countries on popular social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and twitter. Modi also launched his official mobile application to connect with citizens and updated his everyday activity on that app. Prime Minister Modi has changed the perspective of informative and technological gap used to happen between younger and older generation in Indian politics and able to establish his image as the leader of new generation fulfilling and connecting with the aspirations of younger generation. Following the trend, aspirant politicians Now a days extensively used social media platforms to showcase their performance.

**Prospect vs challenges of social media platforms in enhancing Democracy in India**

In terms of governance, e-governance is helping to create efficiency, accountability and transparency in political system. In India, digital platforms are profoundly used in government services. Digital India campaign promoted

by current Prime Minister Narendra Modi provide government services to every citizen through digital platformswhich is creating efficiency and transparency in the system. Digital India drive has changed the Indian traditional market system towards digital economy introducing digitalisationin payment system via government initiated digital payment system,promoted e-commerce businessetc.Besides, sharing information is animportant feature of social media which enable to spread information among public in quickest and easiest way on government policies, laws etc. helping to spread awareness, directives, can use as a tool to pressurise government in need of intervention.Additionally, it works as watchdog against abuse of power by ruling government, officials, political leaders and political parties. The benefits have widespread impact, resulting the popularity of social media platforms among people across the globe.

One of the major challengesfromuse of social media platforms is the spread of misinformation which may create animosity in society, spreading politically motivated agendas etc.The divisive role played by the social media on politics is a matter of concern. Manipulation and polarisationbased on religion, ethnicity, community became new norm in political discourse on social and electronic media. Spread of misinformation on socio-cultural cleavages, hate speech benefiting the vested interest groups is key pernicious determinants affecting democraticsociety that may create chaos among people. People are more divided based on identity rather than brotherhood which is helping political parties to divert attention from larger issues of development and prosperity. It is dangerous for democracy as it may lead towards an authoritarian government rule supported by majority voters and aggressive nationalism creating exclusive, alienation and insecurity among the sections of minority citizen (Sharma, 2019).Targeted political intimidationand threat is harmful for diverse society like India while people fear to speak the truth. The lack of restriction and cross-checking is the biggest drawback of these platforms as the individualis the sole creator of the content and there is a huge possibility of misuse of these platforms, spreading misinformation or doctored videos, content etc. during election time which may mislead voters.In terms of rules and procedures, there is lack of accountability for spreading false information in social media. Besides, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEIT), Government ofIndiain 2022 has created a three-member grievance redressal committeeto regulate and control the content shared in social media platforms which was opposed by tech companies and viewed as move to control social media platforms by the government.

## CONCLUSION:

Advancement of technology made easier to get access and analyse data which has started playing key role in understanding demography, religion, community, caste complexities of a region. These factors play important role in determining the election outcome. In terms of voters' benefits, as a citizen of a democratic country, it is

helping to express one's opinion without physical contact and platform, e-governance facilities and services is creating efficiency, accountability and transparency along with creating socio-political-economic awareness about the rights and duties of its citizens. It is helping to generate public opinion and mandate on issues related to citizens. Social media platforms work as a medium between voters and representative which helps to make easy communication without any hindrances. However, strict regulations regarding false information is need of hour which can improve the functioning of social media and make help in the process of democratisation.

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