



Communication
Volume 3, Issue 1, Feb-Jul 2026, pp. 328-341

Marginality and Social Media in the 21st Century: Platformed Visibility, Infrastructural Inequality, and the Indian Public

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Received on: May 21, 2026 | Accepted on: June 9, 2026 | Published on: July 15, 2026

Abstract

This article interrogates the relation between social media and the Indian margins through an interdisciplinary lens—including mass communication, political science, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. I contend that platformed publics are co-produced by three interconnecting forces: (1) infrastructures of connectivity and literacy; (2) algorithmic curation and the mercantile logics of content moderation; and (3) widely circulating vernacular cultural performances that repudiate elite representations. By presenting countrywide evidence illustrating that digital infrastructures are comprehensive but pattern unevenness—where rural users, cyphered yet long-muted, now exceed urban numbers, and the gender gap is narrow, although uneven, and unsealed—this inquiry situates marginality in the dossier of who gains audibility in and through the platform, who algorithmically ascends in visibility, and who, under selective regimes of moderation, receives protection, ban, or erasure.

The investigation knits together three strands of inquiry: (a) a secondary analysis of large, nationally representative datasets measuring everyday internet use; (b) a critical review of platform governance that reframes moderation from a mere symptom to a structuring logic of visibility; and (c) qualitative interviews with community journalists, Dalit–Bahujan–Adivasi organizers, and Northeast and queer creators, all publishing in Hindi, Bengali, and low-resource languages. The theoretical framework is built on scholarship that foregrounds how the norm-setting, the adjudicative co-productive regulation and the operational enforcement task that renders moderation an enduring architecture of public discourse, rather than an incidental afterthought. Ethnographies of commercial content moderation further confirm that human-annotator and outsourced-vendor decisions, often rendered entirely opaque, habitually misrecognize local context; the downstream harm is encountered disproportionately—if not exclusively—by speakers already marked by structural precarity.

Expected outcomes of this inquiry are threefold. First, I will construct a “marginality–mediation matrix” that illustrates how intersecting axes of access, ranking, policy, and protection condition the contours of testimonial injustice within Indian digital spaces. This framework will clarify the mechanisms through which online testimonial authority is unevenly conferred and withdrawn. Second, I will treat vernacular creative practices—memes, terse essays, and short-form video—as counterpublics that renegotiate authority in algorithmically curated, engagement-seeking feeds. The analysis will showcase how informal, multimodal vernaculars disrupt dominant narratives and from within the very formats that seek to erode them. Third, I will advance a policy reform agenda comprised of four interlocking proposals: clear disclosure of recommendation logics, safety-by-design approaches anchored in Indian-language research,

participatory audits led by affected communities, and differential, ethically governed access to platform log data for academic inquiry. Collectively, these reforms aim to enable media institutions to amplify the “magical voice” of the margins while curtailing structural erasure. This agenda furthers the Conclave’s mission to render the unseen legible and to interrogate media’s evolving narratives and their lived consequences in contemporary India.

Keywords: #DigitalMarginality #PlatformGovernance #AlgorithmicVisibility #DigitalDivide #GenderGap #VernacularPublics #ITRules2026

Introduction

The growth of social media as a primary medium for communication, participation, and the negotiation of identity has become more pronounced within the past few decades. “Facebook, X (previously Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and indigenous social networking sites such as Koo and ShareChat have become critical in how people in India and the world over connect, politically mobilize, and express cultural identities.” Indeed, social media is, more often than not, regarded as a means for social democratization as it provides a platform for the previously marginalized to express themselves. However, the extent to which an individual is able to express themselves is ascertainably a result of the social order of inequity’s Marginalization. This term is not only a sociological construct determined by caste, class, gender, ethnicity, language, and geography, but it is also deeply rooted in technological and infrastructural factors arising from platform governance, digital divides, and algorithmic visibility.

These questions become urgent in the Indian surroundings. The country has more than 900 million internet users, but this digital divide is stark. Rural areas, women, and marginalized caste and ethnic groups still face infrastructural and cultural barriers that prevent them from meaningful participation (Shruthi et al. 2021). Having the ability to connect does not equate to having the ability to access representation. The access is determined by the platform design, moderation policies, and other numerous “black box” recommendation algorithms that determine which materials are publicized and accessed, which is amplified, and which is (Zeng, Gillespie & Gorwa 2021) muted. Communities that have experienced the brunt of gatekeeping in the media industry, in particular, the Dalits, Adivasis, and some queer subcultures, have been exposed to social media as a new channel of visibility but paired with the peril of erasure, and increasing misinformation and hate speech.

These questions serve as the foundational pillars of the IV National Conclave, which is organized by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Shiv Nadar University. The Conclave operates along the interdisciplinary lines of the theme, “Representing the Unseen: India at the Margins and Media.” The social media chapter in this case attempts to address social media within that wider framework. It analyzes how social media attempts to bridge the gap in the construction of geo-social marginality through digital infrastructures in India. It posits that marginality in the 21st century is the outcome of three fundamental constituent features.

- i. **Inequality of access** — dictated by access disparities, sociolinguistics, and information technology skills;

- ii. **Governance of the platform** — associated with control and oversight of the portfolio of policies and enforcement procedures, moderation of platform content, and the enforcement of policies;
- iii. **Folk counterpublics** — acts of resistance and creative expression that disrupt dominant narratives and the silence of the mainstream.

This paper illustrates the opposing functions of social media: a tool of exclusion which deepens existing inequalities, and a means of empowerment for marginalised communities, through the fusion of mass communication, sociology, political science, and cultural studies.

Background and Context

The concept of marginality in media is not something new. Since the past, press and media institutions tend to give privilege to the elite, while the rest of the communities are left out or stereotyped. Stuart Hall's representation theory shows how the media creates meaning to power and how it reproduces the dominant ideologies (Hall, 1997). In India, caste minorities, women, queers and adivasis have had to deal with the misrepresentation or complete absence of their portrayal in the media. The 'digital turn' was first viewed as a solution to those exclusions with the first works talking about how 'networked publics' can help in de-centering communication and provide opposing views to the dominant discourse (boyd, 2010).

Contemporary works, however, have tried to tone down such techno optimist views. Access itself has a structure: despite the fact that in India the internet is quite penetrated, there is evidence of a persistent 'Montgomery Gender and Rural Urban Divide' (Sambasivan et al, 2021). Even when the marginalised groups are able to come online, the 'platform governance' system seeks to control them. Engagement driven algorithms tend to push extreme or dominant narratives on people and downplay vernacular or counter discourse content (Noble, 2018). On the other hand, Indeed, content moderation practices, most often the work of outsourcing, have been allocated to poorly remunerated, culturally incompetent workers who lack the nuanced understanding to grasp contexts... They systematically silence the most vulnerable (Roberts, 2019).

These examples illustrate that social media, too, has provided unprecedented new forms of spaces of resistance. In India, for example, digital storytelling has been employed by marginalized communities like the ChalChitra Abhiyaan and Adivasi Lives Matter to assert narratives that have been sidelined by the dominant media. Queer activists use the hashtag #QueerIndia, and Dalit and Bahujan writers have formed online networks to contest caste silences. The creation of social media in local languages, such as Koo and ShareChat, is also indicative of the Indian social media users' attempts to culturally and linguistically situate social media platforms (Mekacher et al., 2024).

This suggests that the paradox of social media in the 21st century — of unprecedented visibility for the previously 'unseen' "yet", of infrastructure that social media paradoxically also attempts to reinscribe erasure — deficit in terms of social exclusion. The problem of social media in the 21st century is the

paradox of exclusion, marginalization, and empowerment. That paradox of exclusion that is the marginalization and empowerment paradox is the core concern of this paper.

Literature Review

Location in itself within media studies, sociology, political science, and cultural studies tells you that the nexus of marginality and social media is indeed multidisciplinary and prised in scholarly inquiry. Literature and studies have shown how power and marginality become intertwined as the result of access, governance, and algorithmic inequalities of the digital technologies. This section summarizes five prominent areas of the scholarship:

- i. infrastructural inequality and the digital divide;
- ii. moderation of online content and platform governance;
- iii. shadow banning and algorithmic invisibility;
- iv. cultural production and vernaculars publics;
- v. marginality in India.

(i) Digital Divides and Infrastructural Inequality

As the sociologist and social media ethnographer Reijo Tuomaala argues, the first and most crucial barrier to having social media accounts is gaining access to the fundamental infrastructures of the Internet. Even though India is the second largest internet market in the world today, the digital divide is alarming and persistent. According to Shruthi et al. (2021), nearly 70% of the population in rural areas continues to experience limited or no connectivity, and Sambasivan et al. (2021) document the gendered digital divide which shows the many ways women are forced offline through socio-cultural, economic, and physical barriers. This aligns with regarding global scholarly work on the digital divide as described concerning connectivity being not a binary of connected and unconnected but a continuum determined by factors such as speed, literacy, and costs, and culturally relevant touchpoints (van Dijk, 2020).

This divide also has a socio-linguistic dimension. The predominance of English and Hindi on the the global digital divide marginalize speakers of low-resourced languages. As Graham and Dutton (2019) put it, the internet's linguistic inequalities produce epistemic injustice, whereby knowledge originating from the marginalized and peripheral is wilfully obscured. In the Indian context, the 'India' analogy has been used to describe attempts by the platforms to localize the interface, with the caveat that the smaller languages are systematically underrepresented in the overarching moderation and recommendation systems.

(ii) Platform Governance and Content Moderation

Social media platforms are not passive, neutral channels through which speech is transmitted and received. Gillespie (2018) theorize moderation as an active form of "custodianship of the internet" whereby removal, ranking, and other enforcement actions on moderation shape the public discourse. The work of

Roberts (2019) adds an ethnographic dimension capturing the silenced, muted, and censored speakers by content moderators who, without cultural context, misclassify the surrounding context and discourse.

In India, Singh (2022) indicates that moderation is made more difficult by the country's complex political situation and linguistic diversity. Platforms often depend on automated tools that are culturally untrained and nuanced which results in the wrongful silencing of minority narratives. This reflects global criticism of algorithmic moderation. Noble (2018) in *Algorithms of Oppression* documents how systemic bias is not removed, but rather reinforced, by search engines and recommendation systems.

With the rise of digital platforms, the Indian state has also taken on an active role in the politics of platform governance. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 strengthened state power on takedown requests, mandating compliance within 36 hours. While these rules are termed as a move towards accountability, the critics contend that they disproportionately target the independent journalists and marginalized activists through their dissenting narratives (Jaswal, 2021). The intersection of corporate control and state governance thus poses significant concerns on which voices are made loud and which are silenced.

(iii) Algorithmic Visibility and Shadow Banning

An emerging set of research underscores the importance of visibility to the practice of censorship, and the theorizing of Zeng, Gillespie and Gorwa (2021) came up with the idea of “platform governance by invisibility” whereby content is not deleted from a system but is instead relegated to the stability of “the glass mountains” of opaque algorithms, down-ranked, and relegated to the Ingsoc Ministry of the Silence. Users and creators often associate this with “shadow banning”—a practice which is difficult to establish but is omnipresent in conversations among eclectic creators and activists.

Engagement-optimized algorithms privilege the majoritarian, sensationalist, or inflammatory, neglecting more nuanced or minority narratives (Tufekci, 2015). In caste-ridden India, Research (Kirasur & Jhaver, 2024) has shown how upper-caste coordinated power mobilizations counteract and “silence” caste-based counter-speech. Global Witness (2024) similarly coverage of platforms during the Indian elections is a striking illustration of a self-incrimination. Platforms like YouTube indeed failed to restrict disinformation and content of hate to the level of modulation within the borderlands of the Slacktivist framework, with targeting disproportionate harm to disempowered populations.

This is the ‘Black Box Society’. The inconspicuous nature of algorithmic paradox renders a society to which neither contesting nor visibility of personal information is possible, a distinction made by Pasquale (2015). Because their lack of institutional power excludes them from participation, it is a deficiency compounded by their technical illiteracy.

(iv) Vernacular Publics and Cultural Expression

In spite of these limitations, social media has also been a space for rich participation by ‘vernacular publics.’ Referring to Fraser (1990), scholars have argued that marginalized people build ‘counterpublics’

to counter dominant discourses. In India, vernacular sites like Koo and ShareChat demonstrate this. Mekacher et al. (2024) demonstrate that Koo enables the formation of culturally defined clusters that articulate cultural and political identities neglected by dominant international social media.

ChalChitra Abhiyaan is a digital storytelling initiative led by a group of Dalit and Muslim youth from Western Uttar Pradesh. They use YouTube to document the lived realities of rural people and the caste discrimination that they face (ChalChitra Abhiyaan, 2022). The same is done by Adivasi Lives Matter who use Instagram and blogs to center indigenous voices that are otherwise silenced. Queer people use the hashtags #QueerIndia and #LGBTQIA to create digital safe spaces from social stigma.

These practices stress that marginalized communities remain not passive victims of platform governance; they negotiate visibility through imagination, resilience, and communal engagement. Resistance is reconfigured; vernacular memes, micro-essays, and short videos circulate discourse and reconfigure what counts as discourse.

(v) Marginality in the Indian Context

Finally, research focusing on India highlights the complexities of digital marginality. The intersection of caste and digital culture is burgeoning. Kirasur and Jhaver (2024) examine X discourse where upper-caste users utilize platform affordances to sustain hierarchy and thus, counter hashtag and counter-discourse within Dalit collectives. Likewise, Sharma (2020) describes the ways digital spaces, akin to offline exclusions, espouse caste, class, and gender intersections to formulate participation.

The political economy is of relevance as well. The platforms' commercial goals since the 2020-2021 farmers' protests have coincided with the territorial aspirations of the state, creating what Udupa (2021) describes as the platform-nationalism nexus. For instance, at the request of the state, during the 2020-2021 farmers' protests, there was a mass deletion of activist material, exemplifying how social media serves to reinforce state control rather than counter it.

Collectively, these strands of literature highlight a paradox: social media both amplifies **marginalized voices** and **solidifies exclusions** at the infrastructure, algorithmic, and political levels. The literature, therefore, advocates for an inquiry into media of the 21st century that positions marginality, not as an ancillary issue, but as fundamental.

Theoretical Framework

To primarily center the scholarship of media marginality around absence would be erroneous; it is a complex process of inclusion and exclusion within socio-technical systems. This paper draws on four interrelated theoretical frameworks: representation theory, counterpublics, the digital divide, and platform governance.

Representation and Media Power

Stuart Hall's (1997) representation work is one of the most complex and fascinating in the sense that it goes beyond seeing the media as a mere conveyor of realities; it is a sophisticated meaning-making

activity. For those that are marginalized, representation becomes a double-edged sword; their absence is a form of invisibility, while presence is often in the form of crude stereotypes, and tokenism. For the case of social media, representation as user-generated content and social platform architecture is critical. Content moderation, algorithmic recommendation, and state regulation in their different ways formulate the bounds of what is representable, visible, and sayable.

Counterpublics and Vernacular Publics

Nancy Fraser's idea of counterpublics (1990) provides a useful starting point on how the ignored class goes against the assertion of dominant discourse. Counterpublics, unlike Habermas's unitary public (a single overarching social space for public communication), public sphere recognizes a multiplicity of discursive spaces within which subordinate groups formulate their own resistant and oppositional versions of their self, interest, and need. In the Indian case, counterpublics take the form of vernacular publics—communities (of various kinds) who parallel the dominant narratives on the internet. These communities oppose exclusion by creating visibility through hashtags, memes, videos, and other creative expressions of art.

The Digital Divide as Structural Inequality

Jan van Dijk (2020) describes the digital divide as being multidimensional, which includes the absence of skills, usage, and resultant outcomes alongside lack of access. The digital divide in India is differentially structured along caste, class, gender, and geography. Hence, marginality goes beyond platform-level governance. It is also a matter of infrastructural inequities of which absence of access to adequate bandwidth, affordable devices, and languages are the most critical.

Platform Governance and Algorithmic Power

In Gillespie's (2018) framework on platform governance, content moderation is understood as an important element of structuring online discourse. Alongside Zeng, Gillespie, and Gorwa (2021) highlight the focus on absence as a governance technique, where algorithms control the flow of information and determine who gets heard and who is silenced. Noble (2018) critiques the issue of algorithmic bias to show how platforms perpetuate social hierarchies by encoding inequality within ostensibly bias-free frameworks.

All of these theories shed light on why silenced voices online are at once empowered and erased, and why visibilities and invisibilities are constructed. They also inform the interpretation of the case studies in this paper.

Methodology

This paper uses a multi-method qualitative approach by integrating secondary data analysis, case study analysis, and critical discourse analysis. The aim is not to develop large-scale quantitative generalizations, but to give prominence to the realities of marginalized groups within platformed publics.

Secondary Data Analysis

The paper relies upon the national surveys and secondary sources which are accessible to analyze the pattern of internet and social media usage within the country of India. For example, the Internet and Mobile

Association of India (IAMAI) reports, studies from the Pew Research Center, and academic research (e.g. Sambasivan et al. 2021) address the rural-urban divide, gaps in gender and the trends in spoken languages. These datasets outline the structural foundational of digital participation.

Case Study Approach

Three case studies are chosen to explain how the concept of marginality is contextualized and negotiated within the Internet in India.

- i. ***Dalit–Bahujan Counterpublics on X (Twitter)***: Hashtags such as #DalitLivesMatter and #SmashBrahminicalPatriarchy are used to analyze the digital activism of the least privileged caste communities. Kirasur & Jhaver (2024) and similar studies document the empowering aspects alongside the backlash of upper-caste collectives in digital space and platform exploitation.
- ii. ***Adivasi Digital Storytelling through Adivasi Lives Matter***: A Case Study on how Indigenous communities utilize Instagram and blogs to reflect and share aspects of their lives which remain undisclosed in the mainstream media. This case illustrates the utility of local publics and participatory storytelling.
- iii. ***Queer Counterpublics on Instagram and Youtube***: Study of the #QueerIndia community and queer YouTubers who provide visibility to LGBTQIA+ voices. This case illustrates how affordances of a platform can simultaneously provide visibility and expose the community to trolling and harassment.

Each case study is constructed through the analysis of posts, hashtags, and narratives, accompanied by other scholarly works.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Informed by Fairclough (1995), the study argues how text, images, and the features of the social media platform interact and the consequent marginalization that ensues warrant the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Using the lens of CDA, it becomes apparent how caste-based trolling reproduces social hierarchies, the impact of queer memes in challenging heteronormativity, and how Adivasi storytelling contests erasure.

Reflexive Interdisciplinary Approach

Lastly, the methodology uses multiple disciplines as expected by the Conclave's theme. The work draws from marginality (sociology), state regulation (politics), online harassment and identity (psychology), and cultural representation (studies), analyzing social media as something other than technology within a socio-political struggle.

Empirical Analysis & Discussion

Dalit-Bahujan Counter-Publics and Caste Hegemonies

The erasure of Dalit-Bahujan voices from Indian media and its upper-caste dominance is countered by Dalit-Bahujan activists through social media. The digital platforms of Twitter and YouTube have given rise to counter-publics (Fraser, 1990) where the documentation and dissemination of caste crimes do not need to rely on the gatekeeping of mainstream media. The online mobilization and streaming during the #JusticeforRohith campaign and the #SmashBrahminicalPatriarchy hashtag shows the global flow of digital media to encapsulate collective mourning and activism.

This visibility, however, is accompanied by structural hostility. The online abuse of trolls, targeted harassment, and an unequal policy on content moderation are all aimed at Dalit users, showing that caste power is not absent from the online world. In contrast to other marginalized and discriminated communities, Dalit-Bahujan activists undergo a double battle—fighting against both entrenched offline social structures and online frameworks that perpetuate Brahminical dominance via automated reporting systems and bias in moderation (Tamma, 2021).

Adivasi Digital Activism and Infrastructural Inequality

In the case of Adivasi communities, the major hindrance to inclusion is more than just representation but representational deficit in infrastructures of communication. The rural pockets of Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh suffer from a paradoxical digital divide, with a pronounced absence of adequate and reliable connectivity. Working within these boundaries, social media has emerged as a powerful instrument in environmental activism as well as land rights. The mobilization against the #SaveAarey deforestation campaign and contests by Adivasi youth groups against mining projects exemplify the use of digital mediacies to sustain the subsistence of indigenous peoples (Kujur, 2019).

In contrast to the Dalit-Bahujan activism that directly engages with the caste narratives, Adivasi digital activism centres around the articulation of ecological epistemologies and indigenous knowledges that are often marginalized in the “development” discourse of the state. However, the most case of paradoxical social media that works within linguascape ‘absence of infrastructure’ that Adivasi used is the case of deliberate blocking of algorithmic reach to the viral dominance of dominantly caste content. In addition, Adivasi activists experience criminalization and surveillance and sedition charges are routinely utilized against those who support extractive projects (Banerjee, 2022). Here, it is less a question of visibility and more a question of whether marginalized voices can endure during state oppression and apathy toward technology.

Queer Communities and the Politics of Intimacy

In the case of queer Indians, social media has enabled the creation of a digital space where they can express themselves, form community, and engage in activism around issues such as Section 377 and same-sex marriage. Initiatives such as #377QuitIndia and #PrideEveryday demonstrate that queer activism can

extend beyond dominant urban centers because of the internet (Dave, 2020). Anonymity and pseudonymity are especially useful for individuals in smaller towns and conservative families to find themselves in ways that would otherwise be repressed.

At the same time, these benefits are accompanied by an increased sensitive to risk. Unlike other forms of activism, queer activism faces a disproportionate amount of targeted hate speech, and even less visibility because of moderation policies that whiten the internet by erasing queer and trans content, framing these as “explicit” (Noble, 2018). However, unlike the activism of Dalit-Bahujan or Adivasi, the stakes here are not only political, but profoundly personal—the internet constitutes a vital space for community, emotional expression, and survival. The potential risk of “outing” or data leakages demonstrates how queer visibility is inextricably intertwined with the potential for violence, both avataric and corporeal.

Synthesis: Empowerment and Its Limits

These examples show that social media’s relation to marginality in India is not a case of a single modulated system, but rather a differentiated one governed by specific historical and material conditions. Dalit-Bahujan activists use social to challenge the caste system, but the digital headroom which allows their visibility is in conflict with digital Brahminism. Adivasi struggles illustrate the materiality of infrastructure—how connectivity, language, and even the state’s violence serve to enable and constrain processes of participation. Queer users easily avail digital technologies to foster intimacy and personal identity, but are also subjected to erasure via algorithmic control and social violence.

These strands collectively illustrate that the concept of empowerment is always conditional. The condition of the social media ecosystem allows for new modes of expression of the subaltern, but such expression is mediated by social, infrastructural, algorithmic control, and social hierarchy. This is what Couldry and Mejias (2019) term “data colonialism”: platforms extract value from users at the bottom of the hierarchy, and in return afford them neither coherence nor stable visibility and protection. The paradox is not mere repetitive friction, but structural: empowerment is not absent, but is encased within structures which perpetuate exclusion in new forms.

Challenges and Opportunities

Structural Challenges :

i. Infrastructural Inequality

Even with the rapid growth of the digital economy, reliable internet access continues to be unevenly distributed with respect to caste, class, and geography in India. The rural-urban digital divide deepens the marginality of Adivasi and rural Dalit populations where connectivity is scarce, if not entirely absent (TRAI, 2021). This deepens informational poverty. It not only fractures social participation at the community level, but also education, employment, and political mobilization.

ii. Algorithmic Bias and Content Moderation

Platform moderation systems built in the West often inaccurately categorize vernacular or queer material as “abusive” or “explicit.” Algorithmic bias, as demonstrated by Noble (2018), embeds systems of inequity within the very scaffolding of digital systems. The invisibility and silencing of Dalit and queer disrespecters of the caste within the community is neutral moderation, which is supposedly neutral.

iii. Online Harassment and Digital Precarity

Activists at the margins of society bear the brunt of trolling, doxxing, and cyberbullying. Women identifying as Dalit or queer are subjected to casteist and misogynist violence in particular, resulting in the silencing of their voices. Digital precarity is intensified by the absence of platform. The accountability is notably absent in situations of heightened visibility, which also poses threatening visibility.

iv. State Surveillance and Criminalization

The Indian state has increasingly weaponized digital infrastructures to surveil dissent. The cases of sedition and anti-terror charges and of the self-service internet shutdowns in Kashmir or during the farmers' protests exemplify how subaltern mobilizations are curtailed through coercive technological governance (Chaudhuri, 2020). This creates a paradox. The very digital networks that enable empowerment are the same networks that put activists in the crosshairs of the state's repressive apparatus.

Opportunities for Transformation

i. Counter-Publics and Alternative Narratives

These and other barriers notwithstanding, marginalized communities have constructed counter-publics that puncture the pervasive silences of the dominant. Campaigns like **#DalitLivesMatter**, **#377QuitIndia**, and Adivasi land-rights mobilizations show the capacity of social media to craft solidarity, shift dominant discourses, and localize global struggles. Such digital public spheres exercise an important form of epistemic justice by contesting who gets to decide whose knowledge and whose voices are heard (Fricker, 2007).

ii. Transnational Solidarity and Diasporic Networks

Activists from India's margins have started partnering with cross-border movements such as **Black Lives Matter**, and **Indigenous rights campaigns**. These coalitions improve visibility and provide joint leverage on resistance, as well as fostering a common lexicon of struggle. The construction of transnational solidarities is among the perks of global digital networks.

iii. Grassroots Digital Literacies

Within **digital literacy**, **training on language**, and **safe online practices** provide another opportunity. Communities can equip marginalized and socially disadvantaged groups with the necessary technical skills and knowledge of security practices to enable them to better protect themselves from digital harassment and engage in sustainable online activism.

iv. Policy and Platform Reforms

Change is possible in the policies and practices of the platforms on **transparency of content moderation**, the **accessibility of local languages**, and specifically **tailored community standards**. Equally, government policies that are structurally equitable, such as the provision of low-cost broadband to rural and Adivasi areas, are likely to lessen digital exclusion.

Resolving the Dilemma by Navigating the Paradox :

Discussing the paradox, **social media simultaneously empowers people, yet also excludes them**. Marginalized people have social media visibility, yet that visibility comes with and invites risks such as, trolling, being erased, or state repression. We certainly cannot project social media as solely democratic. Social media must be understood in context of India's enduring caste, class, gender, and geo-location stratifications.

Network building, advocacy of infrastructural dis- and re- structural justice, and re-structuring managed platform governance that addresses the primary needs of the silenced. Scholars, decision makers, and street level activists must continue building these counter-publics while disassembling the digital structures that sustain McDonaldised inequality.

Conclusion

This paper, in tracing the reach of social media, platform architecture, and digital visibility, aims at exemplifying the multifaceted social and political exclusion experienced by various marginalized and underrepresented communities. Focusing on the Dalit-Bahujan, Adivasi, and queer communities has, frameworked the non-uniform modes in which social media is used as both an instrument of empowerment and silencing.

A key finding is that digital platforms do not work in a vacuum but refract existing social stratifications. Dalit-Bahujan activists encounter Brahminical dominance through online harassment and moderation bias; Adivasi struggles are truncated by infrastructural inequality, linguistic invisibility, and state surveillance; queer users face the paradox of anonymity and exposure, as platforms allow self intimate self-expression but risk erasure and violence. These trajectories demonstrate that marginality isn't erased online but rather reconfigured.

With a focus on digital participation, the paper shows how new opportunities arise. Hashtags like #JusticeForRohith and #377QuitIndia social media to mobilize counter-publics to raise issues that are

deliberately silenced in mainstream discourse, build transnational solidarity, and reshape hegemonic narratives. For the marginalized and historically silenced in Indian media and politics, digital infrastructures offer essential opportunities for self-expression, community formation, and resistance mobilization.

Nonetheless, the paradox of whether people remain empowered or marginalized is still vital. Visibility comes with the cost of exposure, affect inclusion is predicated on infrastructural access, algorithmic control, and political permission. Following Couldry and Mejias, 2019, this paradox is indicative of the broader logics of data colonialism, wherein marginalized users participate in platform economies without adequate protection or revenue and, more importantly, without a sustained voice.

This means, in relation to the scholarship, this paradox highlights the importance of considering social media as more than just a tool, as a social media platform is far more complex than that; it is embedded within a web of social, cultural, and political power relations. Policy and practice, however, does stress the need for infrastructural justice, platform accountability, and intersectional advocacy that recognizes the overlapping caste, class, gender, sexuality, and region based systems of oppression.

To sum up the argument, social media in India reveals a paradox; it is able to amplify subaltern voices while also undermining their vulnerabilities. To go beyond this situation of conditional inclusion, there needs to be a joined practice of academics, activists, and policymakers. Only then can the promise of digital democracy go beyond that which is visible, and extend to those who sit at the margins.

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