



THE DIGITAL AGORA: SOCIAL MEDIA'S TUMULTUOUS ROLE IN FORGING SOCIAL JUSTICE NARRATIVES IN INDIA

Ishika Goel*

ABSTRACT

The paper conducts a complete evaluation of social media's influence on social justice storytelling throughout India by examining both legal aspects and social and political elements. The research investigates how digital platforms serve as democratic tools while simultaneously spreading false information and hateful content. The research bases its analysis on India's developing legal system through a study of the Information Technology Act 2000 and its 2021 Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules. The paper assesses how Shreya Singhal v. Union of India established fundamental digital speech and expression protections through its landmark judicial decision. The paper demonstrates how social media enables marginalised groups to fight against dominant stories through concrete examples of the MeToo movement, anti-CAA protests and farmers' strikes, and Dalit and Adivasi voice amplification. The research investigates how social media platforms become tools for maintaining discrimination based on caste and for spreading misogynistic content and communal division. The research investigates the conflicting relationship between state control and intermediary responsibility and user privacy protection, and Article 19(1)(a) freedom of expression rights in the Indian Constitution. The research advocates for a balanced approach between regulatory oversight and civil liberties protection to create an inclusive digital space that supports social justice for all users.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Justice, India, Information Technology Act 2000, IT Rules 2021.

*LLM, FIRST YEAR, JINDAL GLOBAL LAW SCHOOL, SONIPAT.

INTRODUCTION

The social fabric of India has experienced a significant transformation through the emergence of social media as a dominant force. Social media platforms function as a digital space where social justice narratives emerge through conflict and gain widespread distribution. The digital space functions as a vital arena for public opinion formation and grassroots movement development while fighting against established power systems.¹ Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, have established a democratic information-sharing system that enables marginalised groups to express themselves while grassroots movements achieve their highest levels of success. The digital revolution through social media platforms brings both opportunities and risks because these platforms serve as tools for spreading false information while promoting discrimination and maintaining social inequalities. The Indian legal system faces challenges to adapt to technological advancements because it must balance free speech rights with responsibility and social justice objectives.

Social media platforms serve as a strong instrument that drives social justice movements toward achieving their goals. The platform serves as an efficient tool to make marginalised subjects visible to the public eye. The MeToo movement in India gained rapid spread through online platforms when women shared their stories of sexual harassment and assault, which started a national conversation about holding powerful figures and institutions accountable. Social media platforms allow Dalit communities to use hashtags such as Dalit Lives Matter and Ambedkarite Movements to fight caste-based discrimination while uniting people across distances and building support for gender equality and caste justice issues that now lead national conversations.

Social media platforms enable digital movements to. Social media serves as an effective instrument for both awareness creation and group mobilisation and unified action. Activists and citizens can use social media to plan demonstrations and spread protest information, and coordinate their efforts at high speed. Social media platforms enabled the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and farmers' protests of 2020–2021 to maintain extensive movements while gaining broad public backing. Through real-time updates and livestreams, and user-generated content sharing, social media enables regular citizens to participate directly in

¹ Anuj Jalwal and Garima Kumawat, 'The Digital Uprising: How Social Media is Amplifying Gender and Caste Narratives' (2025) 13(II) International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology 772–778.

politics while monitoring government activities. The way activism functions in India has undergone a complete transformation because social media now enables decentralised networked resistance instead of traditional top-down organising methods.

Social media democratisation faces ongoing threats because misinformation, together with hate speech, continues to spread widely across these platforms. The algorithms that help spread messages of hope and solidarity can be used by malicious actors to distribute false information, propaganda and divisive content. The spread of false information through these platforms has established an environment where public opinion becomes more divided while violence against minority groups increases. Fake news spread during politically important times creates a major obstacle for maintaining both honest public dialogue and proper democratic operations. In a country as diverse and socially complex as India, the weaponisation of social media to spread communal hatred and caste-based prejudice can have devastating real-world consequences, leading to mob violence and social unrest.²

The Indian government established multiple laws to manage social media content through regulatory measures. The Information Technology Act of 2000 serves as the fundamental legal framework that enables electronic transaction management and cybercrime regulation. The Information Technology Act received multiple updates through amendments, which led to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 becoming the most important addition to the legal framework. Social media intermediaries must comply with three main requirements under these rules, which include fast content removal of illegal material, the establishment of grievance handling officials and assistance to law enforcement operations.

The IT Rules of 2021 face strong opposition because they provide the government with broad authority to block online content and monitor user data. The requirement for significant social media intermediaries to reveal the source of information faces opposition because it threatens to disable end-to-end encryption and creates a negative impact on free speech. The government now has the authority to restrict online information access for national security and public order purposes and other specified reasons, which creates risks for both improper use and suppression of dissent. The new fact-check unit provision in the rule amendments has intensified digital

² Sherin Farhana EV, 'Tackling Social Media's Hate Speech Problem in India: An Analysis' (2022) 4(1) *International Journal of Legal Science & Innovation* 808–814

civil liberties concerns because it enables the government to identify and mark false online content.

The judiciary in India has played a crucial role in shaping the legal discourse around online speech and the regulation of social media. The Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015)³ struck down Section 66A of the IT Act,⁴ which criminalised the sending of "offensive" messages through communication services, as unconstitutional on the grounds of vagueness and its chilling effect on free speech. The court decision received widespread approval as a significant achievement for digital age free speech protection. The courts recognise that freedom of expression needs protection, yet they also support state authority to preserve public order and stop hate speech distribution. The future of online freedom and intermediary liability in India will depend on the results of current legal battles against the IT Rules 2021.

The challenges of regulating social media⁵ these are compounded by the complex sociocultural context of India. The social practice of caste discrimination has evolved into new, dangerous forms that exist within digital spaces. The online world exposes Dalit and Adivasi people to hate speech, cyberbullying, and discriminatory comments, which social media platforms fail to handle properly. Social media platforms have started to include "caste" as a protected category in their hate speech rules, yet their enforcement methods show weak and irregular patterns. The ability to remain anonymous online enables people who commit caste-based abuse to feel more confident in their actions, which makes it hard to identify them. The digital expression of casteism continues to support social inequality while creating substantial emotional distress for those who experience it.

Social nonconsensual intimate image sharing and online harassment. Women who express themselves strongly through social media platforms face challenges. The platform serves as a strong tool for feminist activism, yet it enables the growth of misogynistic content and media functions as a dual-edged tool that affects women in India in both positive and negative ways. Aggressive online harassment, which includes violent threats and public exposure of their

³ *Shreya Singhal v Union of India* (2015) 5 SCC 1 (SC)

⁴ AMLEGALS, 'IT Rules, 2021 - A Step Towards Shaping Safer Social Media Platform' (AMLEGALS, 6 January 2023)

⁵ Admin, 'Social Media and Its Impact on Indian Society' (UPPCS Magazine, 2025)

personal information. The practice of online abuse creates a fear that prevents women from taking part in public activities and makes them avoid sharing their opinions.

Social media functions as a complex and disputed platform that influences how Indians understand social justice through their narratives. Social media enables people to gain power while it creates new possibilities for social transformation, yet it presents multiple risks and obstacles. The digital space mirrors Indian social inequalities because it has become a battleground for achieving equality in society. The legal system operates in a state of continuous change because it works to establish equilibrium between citizens' free speech rights and their protection from dangerous content.

Social media will present new technological challenges and possibilities because technology keeps advancing. Social justice in India will receive its direction from how the nation handles its evolving digital environment. A collaborative effort between government entities and social media companies, civil society organisations and citizens will determine how social media transforms into a force for good while reducing its destructive potential. The digital agora will continue to serve as an inclusive platform for social justice through three essential measures, including digital literacy promotion, enhanced grievance handling systems and the development of respectful online conduct.