Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

This chapter is devoted to frame a theoretical framework of the study, clarifying and explaining the concepts and terms such as political communication, democracy and social media and on providing interrelations between them. The theoretical framework will be further useful in the following sections for the purpose of analysis.

Political Communication

Political Communication is a process of interaction which is concerned towards the spreading and sharing of information among politicians and public. News media plays an important role in this. The process operates in all the directions, i.e., from the institutions of governance towards citizens, horizontal transmission of information between different political actors, and also in the form of upward transmission or interaction from the public opinion towards government or authorities.[1]

The literature in the field of political communication can be further divided into three major categories based on the focus of the studies. These studies are divided based on their focus given to the different elements in the process of political communication, i.e., production process, contents and effects. Studies regarding production process focus on the generation of the messages by different political actors such as political parties and interest groups and how these messages are transmitted by means of direct channels such as direct political advertisements as well as indirect channels such as newspapers, radio and television. Another research tradition has focused on the contents of the generated information or messages produced by the process of production such as what amount of and in what tone a report is presented in the news on television, the coverage of various political events such as election campaigns, presentation of the reports of

policies and discussion on those policies and how the social minorities are presented in the news media. Moving beyond this, the main challenge is to relate the content of the generated information or messages to the cause of its production or to its effect. Lastly, studying effects has been perhaps the biggest interests of the researchers, especially in United States. In these research works, the focus is to study the impacts of exposure to varieties of political communication messages (Norris, 2004).

This research work is going to focus on the political communication in the Facebook pages of the national political parties in India. However, the main focus is on the strategy of generation of messages by political parties, the amount of the content produced by the political parties in their Facebook pages and how they react or counter-respond to the responses in form of posts by individuals and critical or supportive comments of the people regarding messages generated on those pages itself. In other words, the research work is inclined to study about the openness, free and interactive nature of political communication in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. This kind of political communication is characterised with the democratic political systems. Thus, this paper will investigate if the political communication on the Facebook pages of national political parties in India (the biggest representative form of government in world) is democratic or not.

In order to proceed in the study it is important to look into the theories explaining the political communication in a democracy.

Public Sphere and its Evolution

Jurgen Habermas' theory of public sphere is of such an importance that no good quality analysis regarding the role of media for development in a democracy can be done without mentioning it. Habermas' theory is one of the main theories used to describe the development of

political communication in democracy with the evolution of social media and its role in developing democratic communication. Jurgen Habermas talked about the origin, potentials and degeneration of the public sphere of bourgeois of eighteenth century.[2] This public sphere was engaged in rational debate on the important political matters which contributed in enlightened ideas such as equality, justice and human rights (Habermas, 1991, p. 69). Habermas talked about this public sphere and the conditions such as infrastructure and the norms and practices that supported the flourishing of critical and rational discourse. The public sphere that formed in the seventeenth century urban culture with its coffee houses, print media and intellectual salons. The central point in the communication in the public sphere was the rational and critical argumentation and discussion. The strength of made arguments was important and not the identity of speaker (Habermas, 1991, p. 54). At that time citizens criticised and discussed rationally about the actions of government and hence checked arbitrary power of government (Habermas, 1991, p.120). Habermas also refers to 18th century when for the first time press emerged as a genuine instrument of public engaged in critical political debate. While many changes occurred since that time the press provided opportunity for people's opinion (Habermas, 1991, p.60). Public opinion reflected in the form of common sense. It was scattered among people as prejudices, but still it reflected the authentic needs and true susceptibility of common life (Habermas, 1991, p.120). Public opinion was formed out of public discussion when public by means of education and information had been in a situation to reach a considered opinion. Though, public opinion reigned but it stopped to govern with the emergence of parliamentary democracy to some extent as a result of public sphere. In the parliamentary system, parliamentary discussion helped in the formation of public opinion which informs the government about its desires and government in turn informs about its policies to the public opinion (Habermas, 1991, p. 239). However, Habermas explained about how public sphere

decayed as an institution with the rise of industrialization and the mass popular media. According to him, the mass media have from one perspective accomplished an incomparably more prominent range and adequacy - the public sphere itself has extended correspondingly. On the other hand individuals have been moved ever farther of this sphere. "The more people's effectiveness in terms of publicity increased, the more they became accessible to the pressure of certain private interests, whether individual or collective. Whereas formerly the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and amplification of the rational/critical debate of private people assembled into a public sphere, it now conversely gets shaped by the mass media to begin with"[i] (Habermas 1991, p. 188). For Habermas, all the problem have started with the press becoming commercial and profit oriented. This made people simple consumers of the information (Habermas, 1991, p. 184-190). The advertising business started and it put whole new basis for the financial calculation. In the condition when the number of buyers multiplied and price per copy lowered greatly, the publishers could rely on making the large space of paper reserved to sell for advertisements. Increasing efficiency by developing technical and organizational structure demanded the change of policy of the editors to suit the increasing pressure for capital and necessity of business efficiency. This had resulted in the change in the relationship of publisher with editor. Editorial activity which used to be a literary one changed to a journalistic one. Selecting material gained importance over publishing a lead article. The screening and evaluation became more important than rational political debate advocated by effective literary presentation. (Habermas, 1991, p. 184-190).

According to Habermas, the public sphere has decayed due to the commercialization of mass media. The capitalist economy and commercial interests into the mainstream media have led

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[i] Habermas, J. (1991). The structural transformation of the public sphere: An Inquiry into a category of bourgeois society (J. Habermas & F. Lawrence, Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)

to the colonization of public sphere and the rational and critical discourse which is so important for the public sphere. This rationality has been compromised with television playing a frequent role as vanguard. However, Habermas' public sphere has been criticized by different scholars. Marxists point out the limitation of public sphere in terms of exclusion of working class and feminists criticize it in terms of gender. The criticism is sound to some extent as the public sphere provides the opportunity of taking part in governing process while excluding others. It doesn't matter if individuals are uneducated or women, excluding the large part of population from public sphere is not good and is sad.[3]

Political Communication in Democracy and the Role of Public Sphere

Many scholars have tried to explain democracy during the twentieth century. Some of them gave it a broader meaning than the others. Democracy as a concept is continuously evolving, resulting in the previous researches to become outdated and creating a space for new studies and explanation. Diamond argues that there exists a strong relation between democracy and liberty which means that the countries conducting free and fair elections are significantly more liberal than the countries that do not conduct free election.[4] If one assumes this to be a main attribute of the modern democracies, he can stem out some key features which are typical for the minimalist definition of democracy which is also known as electoral democracy. It suggests a system in which decisions are arrived at by the individuals who acquire power of deciding by undergoing a competitive struggle for the purpose of getting people's vote (Diamond, 2003, p. 30). Earlier, Robert Dahl also talked about the competitive elections to be the core of democracy. According to Robert Dahl, democracy suggested that the elections are held such that the opposition also enjoys the same chance of winning and getting office.[5] He also advocated the 'civil liberty' in terms of freedom of speaking or publishing differing views, freedom to join an organization or to form a

new one and freedom to go for alternative sources of information (Dahl, 1971, p. 2-3). However, Dahl doesn't give much attention to non-electoral elements of democracy. He regarded competition and participation as the actual measures of the democracy and encompasses non-electoral dimensions only to provide meaning to participation and competition. However, in the modern days, the meaning of democracy is often associated with the liberal democracy which includes few other elements besides what are the elements of electoral democracy. Among these other elements, special attention is given to pluralism (political and civic) and to the freedom of individual and groups. These are regarded as the important element of democracy because they allow the competition of political values and conflictual interests to be present not only at the period of elections but also beyond it (Diamond, 2003, p. 35).

This addition of new elements to the meaning of democracy is often associated with the social and political change that happened gradually making them an important part of democracy. The main features of the modern democracy were defined by Lipset as below:

1. According to Lipset, modern liberal democracy is characterized by policymaking institutions' dependence in government.

2. Political leaders have right to compete for support and votes of people.

3. In modern liberal democracy there is a freedom to join an organisation or to make new one.

4. Freedom of speech and expression is another feature of modern liberal democracy (Lipset, 1959, p. 69-105).[6]

The only thing which at that time was not included by Lipset in the list was the concept given by Diamond regarding continuous process of representation and articulation, at the period other than that of elections.

The scholars have also identified types of democracies depending upon the way of participation of the public in the process of governance. The meaning democracy for the purpose of this dissertation work is also important to be made clear. Democracy in the ancient Greece meant that every citizen has the equal opportunity to participate in law making (Urbinati, 2008, p. 2).[7] This is the type of democracy which is ideal in its form and in which every citizen plays his role in decision making. It is characterized by regular debates in which citizens participate and arrive at decisions by voting according to their opinions and is usually called as direct democracy (Woolf, 2006, p. 4-5).[8] However, direct democracy is hard to achieve now a days when states' population is huge. This is why, modern democracy has adopted a model of democracy known as representative democracy. It allows citizens to choose or elect their representatives who on their behalf take part directly in the process of decision making. This reduces everyday burden of citizens related to the governance (Woolf, 2006, p. 4-5). Definitions provided by Diamond and Lipset make it clear that long and careful consideration or discussion was one of the core element of any kind of democracy. It meant the decisions making through the process of discussions over issues considered based on their merits by the citizens (or representatives) (Fishkin, 2009, p. 11).[9] In other words it meant the participation of the citizens. So, what unites all kinds of democracies is the ability to participate in the decision making process by expressing own opinion.

Habermas discussed about how public sphere can make representative (parliamentary) government more participatory as it involves rational and critical discussion forming public opinion which checks the arbitrary power of government. However, in the representative (parliamentary) form of government, this public sphere is occupied by political parties in logical terms. So in practical terms, the participation of citizen in the decision making process implies his voting capacity during parliamentary elections followed mainly by passive observation of how

various important issues are being handled and discussed in the parliament. This is due to the result of mass media getting commercialised which in turn largely limited the opportunity of expressing ideas and opinion for citizens and hence people participated in the decision making process by electing government at the period of elections only. According to Donattella Della Porta, the ability to elect government during elections expresses the democratic principal most directly. But this ability to elect government periodically is almost all the time accompanied by the desire to have a more permanent control over the elected government (Della Porta, 2011, p. 802).[10] However, if we go back to the point made by Habermas, one can conclude that people discuss what media suggests them to discuss as the commercialization resulted in the decay of purity of public sphere and less possibilities for people to express their views regarding important issues in a traditional media.

As traditional media started to run on the principles of screening the material to be published based on the profits, people started to get only the information that media wants to provide them. So, what media suggests, will be discussed by the people. Castells's concludes it by arguing that the issues which are not in the media are not in the minds of people. (Castells, 2007, p. 241).[11] Further, few political actors who exert influence over the traditional media are fed by it (Castells, 2007, p. 241).The vast majority of the people feel that they have 'very less' or 'no control' over the decision making process both in the country as a whole or its local areas. This doesn't by any means imply that they don't want to influence the decision making.

This creates a necessity of a new information media for the common people. It leads us from representative democracy to participatory democracy. If we look into the Habermas' public sphere which involved a space for the people to discuss rationally, produce public opinion by contending arguments and exert influence over decision making and if we also keep in mind the

decay of space of free discussion of ideas in traditional media, a stress to create such sphere of open and rational discussion providing with ability of equal and free participation provisions to people will be felt, which is a basic element of a participatory democracy (Della Porta, 2011, p. 803). Within the concept of participatory democracy is the freedom of expression. According to Barber (1984, p. 173), free talk lies at the heart of strong democracy.[12] This democratic talk involves 'listening' as well as 'saying'. Among the various emphases the deliberative democracy theory stresses upon, is the importance communication. This is because deliberative democracy involves convincing people by the force of better arguments (Habermas, 1998).[13] Therefore, participatory democracy is the one in which citizens have access to the policy decisions and can influence making those decisions (Zittel, 2007, p. 17).[14]

However, participation doesn't mean the empirical model of direct democracy which is nearly impossible to achieve in the modern huge societies. This dissertation work focusses on the other institutional means which can help to achieve the notion of participatory democracy rather than direct democracy. For this, the formation of public opinion which is free and independent is required. This public opinion should be free and independent of decayed mass media. This public opinion functions as the permanent opposition to the dominating and monopolistic media (Zittel, 2007, p. 17). So, citizens have the ability to form their independent opinions and exercise control over government and participate in political processes by critical discussions and arguments in an independent and free media which is not monopolised. Social media can be this kind of independent channel. Habermas talked about the importance of public sphere for the democracies ranging from that of the Greek democracy to bourgeois democracy and the democracy in the welfare state in modern capitalism. But, with the decay of public sphere democracy evolved

accordingly and both underwent transformation into different types. Studying the change that the social media has brought about in the public sphere has thus became important.

Social Media, Public Sphere and Democracy

Before going into establishing relationship between these terms, it is important to look into the social media or new media as a notion (these terms are used in the paper interchangeably). We can break down the social media into two words, as done by Safko who points out that 'social' implies the instincts of human to connect and interact with other humans and the second part, i.e. 'media' means the channel or platform used to make such connections (Safko, 2010, p. 4).[15] However, for the purpose this paper Facebook has been taken as social media (see scope and limitations' subsection). Traditionally, mass media which was monopolistic and one-directional media doesn't allowed all the people to participate and connect with each other. However, the only way in which people connect with each other is day-to-day life interactions with the people within one's limited reach. In this sense, social-networks have provided another time saving and convenient way to a person to connect with large number of people. Thus, Facebook is taken as the social media for the purpose of this study.

Social media involves social mobilisation. This produces a need to have an insight into the concept of 'social movement'. Different scholars have interpreted this concept in different ways (some have given a broad meaning while others have interpreted it narrowly). One of the important definitions of the concept of social movement can be said to be made by Herbert Blumer. He defines it as a collective enterprise which seeks to change the existing order with a new order of life (as cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 3).[16] It can be argued that the new order does not necessarily means an order which never existed. It simply means that the order other than the existing one. Social movement may also be directed towards changing the existing order with another one which

existed at some point. Thus, the important point of 'change from the existing order' can be taken from this definition. According to another important definition, social movement refers to a temporary public space, as a collectively created moment that provides new ideals and identities to the societies (as cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 4). The important features according to this definition are 'new ideas' and 'temporary nature of movement'. Another definition talks about social movement being a movement in which common people are in league with more influential people (as cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 4).

From the above definitions, it can be drawn out that social movement is a movement consisting of common as well as more influential people who try to change the existing order of life or provide new ideals to the society. Social movement mobilises people with new ideas and new order of life. However, scholars like Zibechi talk about the difference in the mobilization of elites and masses. He argues that elites undergo vertical mobilisation with a close link with institutions in which conscious social action takes place in a controlled manner. Masses, on the other hand undergo horizontal mobilisation which is spontaneous and is linked with traditional kinship and association of class based on territoriality (Zibechi, 2010, p. 11).[17] Accroding to Castells, the powerful in the society always spy on the citizens, but it is the first time that masses have got the power, at least to some extent, to watch the powerful. Today, everyone has a potentiality to be a citizen journalist who can upload and share about what is going on anywhere or someone is doing something wrong. The only requirement to be a potential journalist is to be equipped by some device such as mobile phones and internet (Castells, 2009, p. 413).[18]

Social media has multiplied the spaces for exchange and sharing of ideas. It has created not a single but multiple 'public spheres' of critical ideas. Social media is also free from the necessity of professional journalist skills. It is convenient in terms of technology, expertise and is

also financially efficient (Loader & Mercea, 2011, p. 759).[19] The citizens need not be passive consumers of various information such as false political party propaganda and government promises anymore. They can challenge the existing discourse with their own opinions. With the development of social media and conscious political communication, Diamond argues, people expect more political participation and accountability as compared to the eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth century (Diamond, 2003, p. 30). However, considering social media to be public and rational can be easliy challenged. If we go back to the Habermas, he stressed the rationality in the public sphere. In this regard, social media can be easily. It is relatively simple people are not always engaged in rational communication. Democratic potential of social media may be easily questioned. However, according Loader and Mercea, moving beyond the traditional participation in mainstream politics, such as casting votes, becoming party member and the like, leads us to a more open and wide concept of democratic citizenship. Accordingly, different set of questions and focus emerges (Loader and Mercea, 2011, p. 761). This approach doesn't focus only on one dimensional dutiful citizenship but recognizes the multiplicity of ideas and more open and personalized meaning of citizenship also.

Social media has provided the development of multi-dimensional and translational communication. Diverse public opinions come in contact with one another. It can be said that there are a lot of public spheres who undergo discussions and interactions inside a particular public sphere, as well as outside it with other public spheres. Social media not only provides expressing one's opinion in the form of text but also images, videos, visuals and graphics. YouTube stories, Facebook images and other such things shared by people regarding different events which influence the politics of the nation can be said to be political and rational interactions. This platform is evolving continuously and rapidly. It can be argued based on the fact that most of the

social media network sites which have a very vast user base, such as Facebook and YouTube have developed after the year 2004 only. This shows the innovative and changing nature of this platform which also makes it harder to draw conclusions with confidence. Even this research work may be not be as useful as now after few years because of the highly evolving nature of social media. But the fact is that social media is increasingly being embraced by the people and has become highly influential in their life as argued by many scholars.

From the above, it is clear that a lot of studies have shown that social media has the potential for expanding the democratic participation of the citizens by enabling them to have free interactions. Hence, debates and discussions which according to the Habermas used to happen in the public sphere have a possibility to get revived with the evolution of social media as a new platform of sharing of information and interaction. However, in influencing the policies and decision making, political parties play an important role in a parliamentary form of government. This is because either a political party comes itself in power after elections or exerts pressure over the one in power by criticising its policies. Can people influence the decision making and have control over it by just discussing it among each other is a question posed against the relevance of Habermas' public sphere by some critiques. In a representative parliamentary form of government, political parties are the entities who actually exert pressure over the government and decision making. That means, people should be able to control and exercise pressure over the political parties by interacting with them which in turn control the arbitrary use of power by government. However, interactions with political parties traditionally was possible only during the elections. In the time of elections parties come with their aims and agendas to interact with people and get votes from them in order to win the elections. Social media has made a more continuous and permanent political communication involving people and the political parties to be possible. The reason is

that general people and political parties are present and using social media actively in the modern times. In India all the national political parties (in 2018) have their own Facebook page and followers of the pages. There is a possibility that these pages can be looked at as public sphere as discussed by Habermas but in a new form in the virtual world of social media. However, can this public sphere be regarded as rational and effective? Do people really interact with political parties freely on their pages? Do political parties respond to people on their pages? Some studies discussed in the literature review section say that no. This paper will study this problem in the context of India which is the largest democracy in the world and hence is perhaps the most important subject to be studied in order to do study about democracy or democratic political communication.

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