

## The Role of Media in Shaping Nationalism: An Analytical Study

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### Abstract

No idea is independent in itself instead it's shaped by many things such as: time, condition, environment, information, knowledge level of society and many more. Media-throughout the history, in its various forms - has impacted the society and people and how they think, what they think, to what extent would they think that what they think is right or wrong. Media is the main force behind the perceptions of people for their nation. The relationship between media- electronic, print or digital – with the nationalism is very complex. It is believed that in contemporary state of affairs that media has become the tool for the politics of right wing populism and authoritarianism. The politics of 'homogeneous' culture, language, identity, has significantly increased and it has become a dangerous for society having cultural diversity. This homogeneous culture is significantly popularized by media through marketization of national pride. So the question is that in the diverse country like India what would be the consequences of these types of generalizations. Conventional mass communication channels such as radio, print journalism and television were crucial in disseminating news to the masses. However, the current landscape has undergone a significant transformation with the rise of digital platforms, social networks, and innovative technologies, enhancing the availability of information without any filtration. By using secondary sources along with thematic based study this paper will critically analyze the role of media and how they are playing a significant role in creating a false perception of 'nation' in the minds of people.

### I. Introduction

To answer the question that, what is the idea of nationalism is defined by many scholars in his many ways so it is hard to point at any one definition claiming it to be true. The idea of nationalism is an evolutionary and its changes its shape with the social and political conditions. However we can conclude the idea of nationalism as 'Psychological Oneness' despite various differences in mores, culture, languages. Benedict Anderson has called nation as 'Imagined Community' (Anderson, 1983). We know that our ideas are not an independent from the circumstances in which we live in so the idea which we develop in that circumstances. Communitarians also believe that humans are the product of the society, they are not independent from there communitarian and societal believes. What they will think depends on the environment they live in. For any idea to get its final shape most necessary element is the information. Here comes the role of media because historically media has bearing the burden to spread information and make people aware about situation and conditions of their nation. The human society of 21st century labeled as consumeristic society by Herbert Marcuse- "one dimensional man" which has changed the role of media from information provider to information maker. Almost every media channels are in this race. A race to win more and more audience and this 'sacred purpose' of media finds its support in consumeristic nature of human (Klikauer, 2022). It's hard to accept that, no means are

considered as wrong and no news seems be wrong, unless or until it fulfill the purpose of making profit out of it. The news media only follows the path of profit, which they get from their continuously increasing reader base along with this they also associate with themselves with the dominant political attitude of state and government. (Entman, 1989)

The current discourse on nationalism in the media is very significant specially when free media is considered as one of the most important element of democracy. There was a time when there were limited and faithful sources of information but as time progresses new technological advancement has changed human's life significantly. With the emergence of social or digital media and with internet revolution in India, now there is a flood of information in the hands of common people along with this the cheap internet services allowing the citizen of India to put forward their views about whatever going around in country. It is true that 4G revolution has definitely revolutionaries the ways of information we used to have but it has also accelerated the spread of false information and false narratives with pseudo nationalist content having emotional touch which often triggers the emotions like- fear, anger, excitement. There are many points in this discourse such as language, religion, freedom of expression, right to dissent, right to equality, patriots versus traitors etc. While defining these elements citizen generally influenced with the information which they get from news media. Now the question is to be asked that are those information is none-biased or biased? Are those information are just informing people about their country's situation or they shaping the idea about country in the minds of people of the land? How far can we trust these tradition media along with new age media? Are they enshrining the right concept of nationalism in common people?

## **II. Influence of media in human behaviour**

Nation is a sum-up of people and peoples are made up of their thinking and belief. As we have discussed earlier that concept of nationalism can be defined as psychological togetherness, it means- 'we are one because we think we are one' and this felling of togetherness or oneness connect us with others, having common social structure, common culture, common language, common religion. "The objective elements in defining nations include a common language, religion, history, customs, territory, and ethnicity. The proponents of objective definitions argue for these objective markers as the fixed criteria for determining membership in a nation." (Dar, 2022). Joseph Stalin stated that "a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (B, 1973) . Many researches has proven that media is influencing the human behaviour which is effecting how people thinks. (Saurabh, 2019) in his work also gave emphasis on this issue "On the other end, however media also affects the human behaviour in negative aspects, i.e., youngsters as well as others who are misusing the media. Thus, media is also harming the society in many way This is firstly done by bringing chaos in the mass through misinterpreting the facts and secondly the media does not produce the real happenings of a world, rather creates a new world."

## **III. Increasing role of digital/social media and the idea of nationalism**

The role of digital among the people is increasing day by day and can't be put under the ignorance while studying about nationalism. Various platforms are providing every kind of information to everyone. Digital platforms can be considered as the too easy way for citizens to connect with state affairs and watch government actions closely but today as we have many sources of information but there is unfortunately no filter on that information which is why this recent upsurge in interest in digital nationalism is so prominent. (Kumari, 2024). A different kind of debate about nationalism has started on the digital platforms but the only problem is that there is no scope for disagreement there because those conceptions are not created based upon the facts or logical explanation but instead on emotional aspects. These emotional posts about mother India and in the name of mother India media groups are selling their news and making people believe in any kind of unfiltered news and fake news in the name of nationalism and patriotism they have started labeling citizens as Anti or Non-Anti (Kumari, 2024).

The biggest danger for the Indian idea of nationalism is the spread of fake news. In India we can categories the kinds of fake news spread on social media, these fake news comes under these themes namely- health, religion, politics, crime, entertainment, and miscellaneous (Al-Zaman, 2021). Among these six elements most relevant elements for this research are religion and politics. As it is evident that the role of social media for politics has gone sky-high during the 2014 election which made NDA government won the election making presence and impact on people of every age group (Anupam Das, 2020). Government sometime creates false narrative about nation, religion to be get benefitted from it in the elections (Prabhsimran Singh, 2020). This significant upsurge in social media also has a monetary value- simply put if anyone controls it, will make large amount of money. Now money has become the motivation factor for media instead of morality, sense of duty, public interest. It seems that we live in 'end of idea' era and we have become 'one dimensional'. Along with profit making nature, the influence of government also made them to do so. If the government wanted them to run specific content about political move or idea or about any religion they bound to do so because for them this is a win-win situation. These fake news seldom become the reason for political and religious violence. (Falnkar, 2020)

These platforms are actually ending the rationality of human being to discuss on any subject. The digital media also can be seen largely as a sign of world-wide connections and cosmopolitan membership. The growing influence of media in molding public perception is increasing significantly without any accountability. This expanding reach, however, necessitates thoughtful consideration because the steady

dissemination of information brings challenges such as false narratives, influence over public discourse, and closed information loops that strengthen pre-existing beliefs. (Kumari, 2024). These evidences are enough to know that if the media would not act as is should act then the idea about nation would be distorted.

#### IV. The Dangers of Ideological Homogeneity

Pluralism has always been an essential association with this cultural nation called India that is Bharat. Our freedom struggle is a classical example of securing this diversity and give space for every religion, culture, ethnicity, language in the sacred text of India known as constitution. Constitution has made media as the fourth pillar of democracy and it has always been a bridge between people and state. But in the era of technological advancement the nature of media has rapidly changed. It has extended at that level where the line between virtual and real has omitted. The media channels are playing same kind of news content again and again -24 hours 7 day- which makes people believe that this news is correct. These competitive media also tries to attract more and more audiences too and in the large populated country like India –to attract the audiences- the easiest way is to run the content supporting majoritarian views with some spicing label on them. In the media business most important thing-important than news – is the language and the style through which any specific type of content are being run on screen. It is the pervasiveness of media that, made people believe on what said (gellner, 1983). The major consequence of this would be the rise of ideological homogeneity because when people see similar type of news flashing in every news channels they will start to believing them because it's very common human psychology that we believe on those things which are supported by many. Common people do not possess so much the rational knowledge of dependent reporting and independent reporting. They either starts to support or go against of those news headlines, which can end any sort of political discourses -which is the backbone of democracy and the complete political control of government over media poses significant risks to the diversity of thoughts and the independence of journalism. (Guo, 2020) The media landscape is becoming increasingly homogeneous due to several factors like commercialization of the industry and the marketing of nationalism as a commodity. Simply put now a day these media platform, whether it is digital platform or television platform, are creating specific kind of concept of nationalism despite acknowledging the idea of diversity of India. Now a day media are not informing us but suggesting us to be or do certain type of things. This kind of marketalization of news and partisan reporting has created uniformity in media, coupled with the pervasive influence of popular culture, business interests, and political forces, poses a significant threat to the core principles of democratic discourses. Media platforms are being used as a tool by the various governments in setting their agendas (Guo, 2020). The effect of these actions would risk the essential foundations of nation. It is also distorting the very idea of inclusive nationalism for which our freedom fighter has sacrificed their life.

This homogenous culture will have pessimistic effect on India society because as we are aware that most diverse society in the world is Indian society. This diversity is not new to India is has the century old history of its diversity. We can call Indian society as an evolutionary society because from the ages it has melted various culture in it and made them Indian. So in this type of diverse society forced uniformity will destroy the inclusive unity. The Indian nationalism will never allow this type of withering away the societal identity which has developed over the ages but this 21st century of commercialized media is doing this very same thing, now the role of media is not limited only to provide the information and act as medium of communication between state and citizen, now they are giving their opinion in the name of information. This commercialization of media has eroded the foundation of ethical reporting and nation too, for them is just another product to sell. They are making people to think what they want them to think. "The media to which people are exposed significantly shapes their beliefs, opinions, and actions, substantially impacting their comprehension of altruism-related issues. Research has consistently shown that an individual's perceptions can be influenced by the extent of their exposure to a particular subject." (Liao, 2023)

#### V. Independence of media over people

The complete political control over all mediums of communications online as well as traditional media is an alarming situation in 21st century which has constantly eroded the belief of people on media. When government directly control the flow of information and start setting narrative according to them, then people start questioning authenticity of media because media is believed to be the fourth pillar of democracy. It suppress the free voices as well as creates an environment in which any contrasting voices are silenced with the help of government machinery. This over government undermines the role of the press as a check on power, making it hard for people to access true information that can help them to make right and informed decisions. Without the freedom of press people becomes an easy target for propaganda and very democratic principle of individuality that hold the burden of democracy begin to fall apart. (Curran, 2007)

Algorithmic control of human behavior: A major factor in determining how individuals interact with political content and nationalist discourse is the addictive nature of algorithms on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Nationalism has become a commodity in this digital market era, it influences people using readily content through memes, reels, shorts, popular hashtags and viral videos (Krishen, 2020). In this way people are actually becoming supporter or opposer but they are very far in becoming information consumer. The same nationalist messages are promoted by these platforms, using various identity symbols to get more and more likes and shares on online platforms. These platforms have become a tool for popularity by manipulating human behaviour. The diverse cultural and historical foundations of national identity could be lost as people interact with these digital representations of nationalism. People can now be exposed to

a vast amount of content in a few minutes thanks to the 4G revolution, without stopping to confirm or evaluate the information they are taking in. (Katarya & Massoudi, 2020). People are very vulnerable to the goals of corporations, political actors as they lack the knowledge necessary to understand the complexity of digital information. Social media's addictive algorithms make this issue worse by feeding a vicious cycle of bias and false information in the mind of people as well as in society (Deibert, 2019). These algorithms lead users down a rabbit hole where the same concepts are presented over and over again, reinforcing stereotypes. Algorithms aim to give preference to content that stimulates a lot of involvement, irrespective of its truthfulness (Gradim, 2021). When the same type of content are circulated all over the social platform, it will create confirmation bias because people constant are watching and liking only those content, whom they believed to be true, and when they find it online in their feed they become sure about their perspective. People are consistently persuaded to accept the same information as true, even when it is factually false (Krishen, 2020).

## VI. Media and constitutional values

Indian constitutionalism provides a good space for freedom of speech and expression in a 'wider sense.' Media is major beneficiary of this, because it is believed to be a voice of common man in democracy. Hence our constitution indirectly lays the ground for the 'freedom of the press' (Gaur, 1994). It works as a medium between citizen and government. This makes the media most powerful entity in state. Independent and free media is a pre-condition for good democracy but the term 'media trial' (Kaur, 2020) degrade the reliability of media because some time it not judiciary but media who started giving it's verdicts about any incidents or person under the weapon of 'question mark-?' This happen because of sensational journalism (Pooran Chandra Pande, 2024) and because of competition too and most importantly this happen because of consumeristic nature of capitalist media (Klikauer, 2022).

## VII. Conclusion

The intersection of social/digital media, nationalism, and online misinformation presents a complex challenge for modern nations. As citizens could become less critical-thinking individuals, they could become more vulnerable to being manipulated by popular political narratives. The lack of sanctions on online sources and the commodification of 'nationalism' only exacerbate these issues, leading to a society where national identity is no longer a force for unity but a tool for digital marketing and political gain, especially a diverse country like India, which could be the most serious victim of these kinds of populism and homogenization of rationality. To avoid this, India needs serious media education. The promise of the internet revolution is enormous; it can be used to literate people about media ethics through the memes, hashtags, or reels because youth are easily reachable through these things, but unless steps are taken to mitigate the negative effects of manipulative and addictive algorithms of social platforms, we risk creating a world where diverse Indian national identity would be wiped out with homogeneity. Only through careful government regulation on social platforms and improved digital literacy would people and nations be saved.

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