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Q8(a)

Discuss the role of social media in communal polarisation. Suggest ways to combat it

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society
Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the role of social media in communal polarisation. Suggest ways to combat it
- Cover rumour, identity, and civic replies

Revision summary

Social media accelerates communal polarisation through outrage, forwards and typed enemies.

It organises existing honour and majoritarian frames more than it invents them.

Riot coordination and humiliation archives are part of its role.

Combat needs fact-check, accountable platforms, local rumour control and digital literacy.

Offline fraternity and mixed institutions must outcompete the feed.

Introduction

Social media is not a communal mind. It is a machine that speeds in-group talk, humiliation, and rumour until a local insult feels like a civilisational war. Its role in polarisation is to organise attention, not to invent every prejudice.

Body

Role in polarisation

- Algorithms reward outrage, so ethnocentric content travels farther than a village argument once did.
- Forward chains and closed groups create echo chambers that confirm Dumont-like us/them purity in a digital idiom.
- Fake videos and identity tags turn Muslims, Dalits, or migrants into instant types, which identity politics of domination exploits.
- During riots and after, social media archives shame and coordinates mobs; Tripura-type FIRs against accounts show the state's late chase.
- It also lets **counter-publics** speak. Polarisation is the dominant commercial use, not the only use.

Why it bites in India

- Beteille's disharmonic society already had ranked honour; the feed supplies daily proof and daily insult.

- Informal youth with phones and insecure jobs are a ready public, as urban slums and campuses show.
- Traditional media and politicians launder social-media frames into 'public opinion'.

Ways to combat it

- Fast, independent fact-check that is trusted across communities, not only a ministry banner.
- Platform liability for amplification of riot speech, with due process so the tool is not only used on dissent.
- Local peace committees and police that treat rumour as a law-and-order fact, as old riot studies already knew.
- School and NEP-style digital literacy that teaches source doubt without teaching cynicism about all journalism.
- **Cross-group offline work:** unions, co-operatives, and mixed neighbourhoods reduce the monopoly of the feed over the we.
- Ambedkarite public culture of fraternity is a content strategy, not only a statute.

Limit

- Combat fails if the offline political economy of ethnocentrism is rewarded at the ballot.

Flow diagram

Social media amplification -> Rumour honour types

Rumour honour types -> Communal polarisation

Fact-check literacy local peace -> Combat

Civic fraternity offline -> Combat

Conclusion

Social media polarises by speeding ethnocentric rumour and honour games in a disharmonic democracy. Combat needs platform rules, local rumour control, literacy, and a civic we that is more rewarding than the mob feed.

Facts & figures

Forward networks

Closed groups that circulate unverified communal content as kinship duty.

Riot rumour

Old mechanism of polarisation now at smartphone speed.

Platform amplification

Design that privileges angry identity content.

Counter-publics

Dalit and peace voices that use the same tools against polarisation.

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