

The Influence of Technology and Social Media on Secular Ideals and Religious Coexistence

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ABSTRACT

The cornerstone of harmonious, pluralistic communities is the coexistence of secularism and religion. Secularism protects people's and communities' freedom of belief by guaranteeing the state's objectivity in religious affairs. Religious coexistence is the capacity of various religion communities to cohabit peacefully while honoring one another's customs and traditions. In the current world, social media and technology have taken center stage in the debate, promotion, and contestation of these ideas. Globally, social media platforms link billions of individuals, boosting voices that support coexistence and secularism. However, they can give rise to problems like hate speech, polarization, and disinformation that jeopardize social peace. With an emphasis on their dual roles as facilitators and disruptors, this essay examines how social media and technology affect religious harmony and secular values. The interactive component of human communication is satisfied by social media, the foundation of modern information technology. We are unable to ignore social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter and live our lives apart from or unaffected by their use in our surroundings. Furthermore, social media has taken on a decisive role in influencing people's social, religious, and cultural lives. Furthermore, it is now impossible to avoid discussing social media's effects, ramifications, difficulties, and threats in academic settings. India's multi-religious, multi-social, and multi-cultural background makes it a promising place to research the effects of religious tolerance on social media. Also, being a secular nation, India supports its citizens' inherent rights to practice their religion as they see fit. However, secularism in India does not imply irreligion; rather, it refers to tolerance for all faiths. In other words, the fundamental tenet of all Indian religious teachings is nondiscrimination based on religious differences.

Introduction

The development of computer-mediated communication has brought about a profound change in how people connect and engage with one another on a personal and social level. The emergence of a computer-mediated community is one important effect of this development. However, without considering social media usage in the global community, it is impossible to envision and understand this "computer-mediated communication" or its resultant "computer-mediated community." Put another way, individuals all over the globe use social media platforms like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, My Space, Instagram, and others to spread their ideas, passions, ideals, and initiatives. Additionally, a lot of people use self-generated and self-oriented communications on various social media platforms to communicate and convey text, images, and music. As a result, social media's effects, ramifications, difficulties, and dangers are becoming inevitable in scholarly discussions, especially when it comes to religious tolerance in modern-day

India. On March 24, 2015, the Supreme Court of India declared that citizens have the right to free expression under Section 66A of the Indian Constitution (IT Act).

One of the most important actions the Indian Supreme Court has made to guarantee everyone's right to communicate is this. In addition to addressing media representation that impedes the inclusion and participation of marginalized communities in matters of citizenship governance and sustainable development, communication rights seek to address the public invisibility of poor, marginalized, and excluded people, as well as their opinions, concerns, and interests. Additionally, the Indian Constitution's Articles 25 and 26 provide the right to freedom of religion. Every Indian person has the freedom to practice whatever religion they want and the right to do so as India is a secular country. However, despite all of the freedoms and rights, India continues to see an unparalleled rise in religious and individual rights discrimination as well as communal rioting. The rise of religious fundamentalism is one of the main causes of this violence. People have exploited social media to propagate hate against other people. In the socio-political arena, religion and its fundamentalist role have become important. Nowadays, it's commonplace for religion to become politicized. As a result, communal riots and acts of religious violence are common in contemporary India. In order to oppress minorities and even damage their houses of worship, religiously motivated political parties have a history of seizing power in both the states and the federal government.

The Foundation of Secular Ideals and Religious Coexistence

Secularism in Historical and Modern views

The theological disputes that afflicted Europe throughout the Reformation and Enlightenment periods gave rise to secularism. In order to guarantee equal rights and freedoms for all person, regardless of their views, it sought to keep religion out of official affairs. Secularism in the modern era may take many different forms, ranging from inclusive secularism that respects religious pluralism (like in India) to rigorous separation (like in France). By encouraging tolerance between populations with different views, religious cohabitation enhances secularism. While cohabitation stresses communal peace via communication and cooperation, secularism offers a legal basis for equality.

Technology has always had a significant role in politics, religion, and society. The impact of social and technical factors on people's behaviors and values has therefore been the subject of much investigation. Religious tolerance, social media and public relations, religion in social media, and social media and journalism are the four categories into which the researcher has separated the approaches to media and religion.

The Role of Technology in Shaping Modern Discourse

The dissemination of ideas on secularism and coexistence has changed as a result of technology, especially the internet and social media. People may access a variety of viewpoints via blogs, videos, and internet forums, which helps them to develop well-informed ideas about these ideals. But it is also possible to use the same instruments that encourage communication as weapons to disseminate divisive discourse. R. L. Briones claims that several studies have not shown social media's ability to serve as more than just another information-dissemination instrument. Research has consistently shown that businesses are predominantly utilizing social media to spread one-way messages rather than fostering more two-way interactions, despite academics' focus on the relational potential of social media. In fact, businesses can see social media as a chance to become into a "news service." Likewise, there isn't a precise definition of "relationships" in social media research. It is common to confuse "conversation" and "dialogue" with the simple act of gathering and disseminating knowledge. M.L. Kent said that there is a fundamental discrepancy between "relationships" and what social media researchers have examined since there is no definition for

them and no reliable metrics to evaluate them. Second, the scholarship's goal of showcasing social media's capacity for relationship-building could work against it. Through a "steady flow of inputs and outputs," Smith highlighted how social media enhances public interactions and fosters connections that support organizational stability.

Information and communication technologies are of interest to sociologists and religious studies, and their processes are increasingly overlapping with religious activities, which have prompted discussion among communication and media researchers. The way the media shape and contribute to strong senses of identity, community, and social belonging is of interest to both sociologists and media researchers. Various fields of study demonstrate how religious groups and practitioners have unique chances to display and negotiate their practices and beliefs in new digital settings thanks to digital technology. According to Campbell, there has been discussion of how the availability of new technology might be seen as both enhancing and challenging the beliefs, objectives, and lifestyles of several religious communities. In the 1990s and 2000s, much of the documentary work on religion and the Internet focused on the simplistic questions: What role does religion play in the context of modern media? In what ways do religious organizations use modern media to further their goals and objectives? What difficulties do established religious organizations and groups face as a result of new communication technologies? In what ways do religious societies use the Internet to inform their daily lives? And how offline religious groups and traditions are influencing the Internet. In order to properly characterize and evaluate the developing link between religion and new media technology in modern society, researchers have become more aware of the need of examining the interactions and interdependencies between religion in both digital and physical contexts.

Positive Impacts of Technology and Social Media

1. Promoting Awareness of Secular Ideals

All forms of communication and information are always changing to meet the ever-increasing needs of technology in the multi-level convergent media environment we live in today. "New media is transforming the way we create, consume, learn, and engage with one other," said Karun Shetty. As a result of the development and popularity of the internet, as well as the activities, goods, and services that have emerged in the digital media space, convergence is here defined as the interconnection of computing and other information technologies, media content, and communication networks. Many experts believe that this is just the beginning, as business, government, art, journalism, health, and education are just a few of the many aspects of social life and institutional activity that are increasingly taking place in these digital media spaces across an expanding network of ICT devices. Researchers have identified three periods in which communication has changed as the cause of the changes that have taken place since the dawn of human existence. The expansion of the ancient empires over many centuries marked the first phase, which had an influence on certain modes of transportation and culminated in the development of new intellectual technologies like writing and math. It created important pathways that linked the East and West regions. Communicative energy evolved along the route, reducing distance and time. Beginning in 1400 A.D., the second phase encouraged the exploration of "discoveries" and "new planets" in conjunction with advancements brought about by printing and the growth of sea transportation.

Social media platforms provide a forum for conversations on secularism, reaching audiences throughout the world and bringing attention to its significance. Efforts to promote the separation of religion and state, such as SecularismMatters, have gained momentum. In order to promote awareness and support for these principles, websites such as YouTube provide films and lectures that explain secular beliefs. These initiatives aid in demythologizing secularism, especially in

cultures where it is politicized or misdefined. Technology helps close the gap between popular comprehension and scholarly discourse by providing easily available and captivating material.

2. Empowering Marginalized Voices

Through blogs, micro blogging sites like Twitter, social bookmarking, sharing sites like Digg, social networking sites, social forums, and review sites, people can engage in meaningful conversations about events, places, people, news, brands, and products thanks to new digital platforms like social media, where technology is empowering people to participate and share content on the Web. Podcasts, Second Life, YouTube, and other virtual worlds are examples of modern technologies. It is noteworthy that the expansion of the social Web is causing individuals to become digital activists and alter their behavior. The advantages of social media are growing for people, companies, and our society as a whole at the same rate as technology is developing new tools to make our online social interactions easier. Many customers are transitioning from being passive buyers of goods and services to becoming active participants in the market. They are able and willing to share their opinions, participate in conversations about products, and seek out conversations about companies or goods they use now or anticipate using in the future.

Before the invention of the computer, individuals had to rely on the conventional methods of reading books, periodicals, and magazines, writing letters, and speaking on the phone or in person to get information. People all across the globe now use the internet to share information. Nowadays, everyone may quickly and easily discover any information on the internet. Furthermore, information sharing has expanded due to the rise in popularity of the internet and the emergence of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The way people communicate is evolving along with the globe. Many individuals now read e-papers instead of the hard-copy print newspapers they formerly relied on. According to Jolyon Mitchell, in the past, individuals would look for a magazine to read. Nowadays, a lot of people are interested in reading blogs by clicking a button. As a result, a message may reach a larger number of members of the target audience by using social media to share information. By linking their social media profiles or posts, participants may establish direct connections with individuals all over the globe. They may also generate a lot of traffic on social media and keep everyone informed about their updates. Social media facilitates the rapid dissemination of all types of information and is crucial when a message aims to raise awareness among individuals worldwide. Therefore, if utilized properly, social media offers a lot of potential for spreading information, even positive news. Through the use of technology, underrepresented groups may raise awareness of injustice and promote equality.

Challenges Posed by Technology and Social Media

1. Amplification of Polarization

Because social media algorithms value interaction, they often promote sensational or polarizing information that widens societal gaps. Personalized feeds limit prospects for meaningful conversation by simply exposing users to material that supports their own opinions. Radical organizations use platforms to recruit new members, disseminate propaganda, and inspire violence against secular or religious groups.

Strong differences in viewpoints are the root cause of many of the difficulties that our society are now dealing with, ranging from environmental concerns to human rights issues. Social media serves as a platform for various viewpoints and makes it possible for ideas to proliferate more quickly than in the past. Significant external events may cause severe polarization, according to earlier computer models. To explore a different hypothesis that opinion amplification might lead to severe polarization we provide the Social Opinion Amplification Model (SOAM). As individuals communicate exaggerated versions of their true beliefs in an effort to attract a larger following, SOAM mimics consequences like sensationalism, hype, or "fake news." For the first time, we demonstrate that this straightforward concept leads to severe polarization, particularly at

tiny degrees of amplification. We also demonstrate that there are two ways to stop such excessive polarization: either by prohibiting people from amplifying more than five times, or by regularly educating the public about balanced viewpoints. When we want attention, it's normal to attempt to be the loudest person in the room. This piece makes the argument that speaking in a moderate manner is healthier for everyone than yelling to be heard and creating a commotion.

Opinions on social media are becoming more and more polarized, with people holding widely divergent views on social, political, and environmental concerns. It is often known that polarization in contemporary communities may have negative effects on the democratic process and reduce tolerance for others. The use of computational models to comprehend the reasons for polarization is gaining greater interest since there is so much at risk. It has been shown that synchronized external events may contribute to polarization. On the other hand, polarization may occur naturally in the network without the need for outside help. People often exaggerate their true feelings about things on social media to get attention since posts that are more intense tend to be more popular. We refer to the variety of user actions that might skew the initial opinion with a more favorable or unfavorable attitude as opinion amplification. These actions include assuming things that aren't true, summarizing or generalizing, selectively citing, editorializing, or misinterpreting.

2. The Spread of Misinformation

Online misinformation that targets particular communities or secular principles spreads quickly and frequently has real-world repercussions. For example, fake news campaigns that allege religious minorities are plotting have resulted in communal violence, as demonstrated in cases throughout South Asia, and distortion of secularism, which is A common misconception about secular policies is that they are anti-religious, which undermines confidence in government agencies. A 2018 United Nations study showed the devastating power of uncontrolled disinformation by highlighting how Facebook was used to instigate violence against Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim population. The frequency, strength, and reach of religious disinformation increase when it combines with social media and targets religious minorities, having a profound effect on society. Furthermore, the majority of false material addressed at religious minorities exhibits political objectives intended to exploit and dehumanize them, making them more susceptible and uneasy. As a result, a new means of marginalizing minorities is religious disinformation on social media.

A deeper look is necessary since religious disinformation seems to have a consistent, strong, and pervasive impact on society (such as mob violence, interreligious conflict, and the deportation of minorities). However, a thorough comprehension of the phenomena is required. Using a mixed-methods research methodology, we examine how religious misinformation contributes to communal strife among Bangladeshi social media users. The results show that about half of the users believe false information, react badly, and support extremist viewpoints all at the same time. We examine some pertinent material in the section that follows. Bangladesh, the fourth-largest Muslim nation in the world with a rising social media following, has been dealing with a lot of religious disinformation online that incites violence against minorities and jeopardizes interreligious peace. We address two relevant research issues after conducting an exploratory sequential mixed-methods study that combines a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative theme analysis. We discovered that people interact with disinformation in three ways: via their discussion topics, responses, and evaluations. Religious, radical, and political concerns are the main topics of discussion among users. Political problems (37.1%) and radical concerns (60.4%) predominate in user debate. The majority of user responses (94.1%) are unfavorable and show various harmful behaviors. It is concerning because the negative replies outnumber the favorable ones by almost seventeen times (5.5%). According to misinformation evaluation results, just

25.9% of users are able to recognize and reject disinformation, while 69.3% of people trust it. At the same time, over half of the users (48.21%) respond adversely, speak radical, and believe false information. Religious misinformation-driven violence may have more political ties than religious ones, according to one study.

3. Online Harassment and Cyberbullying

Online threats and intimidation are commonplace for those who want religious peace and secularism. Similar to trolling and doxxing, activists are the subject of derogatory remarks and the disclosure of private information, which prevents them from speaking out. Abuse of female activists is disproportionately prevalent, especially when they are speaking out on secular or religious matters. Social media's ubiquitous connectedness has made it possible for conversations about delicate subjects like politics and religion to cross geographical borders. But there is a darker side to this digital age as well: cyberbullying. Cyberbullying may become more dangerous when people's social media behavior and the dynamics of heated debates come together. This article explores the intricate relationship between social media dynamics and cyberbullying in conversations about politics, religion, and other delicate topics.

Social media platforms provide people a forum to voice their thoughts on a wide range of subjects, such as politics and religion. However, these conversations can turn into echo chambers where those who have similar opinions disparage others who hold different opinions. Social media's anonymity encourages disengagement, which results in a lack of empathy and decorum in conversation. When debates become divisive, people may use cyberbullying techniques to suppress critics or establish their authority. Religion is a very sensitive and personal topic that often sparks heated discussions on social media. People may advocate, criticize, or contest religious views using these forums. However, when conversations get heated, people may turn to online bullying strategies including targeted harassment, disparaging comments, or religious shaming. Personal assaults and emotional discomfort may swiftly develop from disagreements over religious beliefs or interpretations.

4. Privacy and Surveillance Concerns

Authoritarian governments employ technology to keep tabs on and quell opposition, especially from activists who support minority rights or secularism. Social media surveillance and face recognition are two examples of tools used to find and threaten dissidents. Companies and governments abuse personal information to thwart advocacy and activity. The violence connected to internet rumors affects not just security but also the standing of Indian social media businesses. The lynchings sparked protests from a variety of social organizations, and WhatsApp came under heavy fire for allegedly failing to put in place sufficient measures to prevent the spread of misleading information. These issues should continue even if it has subsequently implemented fixes, such as removing the "quick-share" option. Ahead of the general election in May 2019, Indian society is predicted to become even more divided along religious lines.

In recent municipal elections, the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (abbreviated "BJP") has made considerable advances; in February 2018, for instance, it defeated the long-standing Communist Party of India in Tripura. The BJP's Hindu nationalist ideology is likely to intensify political polarization, particularly along religious lines, ahead of the 2019 election. Social media and internet campaigning were key in generating these advances. According to reports, the BJP has been assisting and using a network of abusive trolls and social media bots to harass opponents, disseminate false information, and start sectarian rumors. Despite criticism for following some of these trolls on Twitter, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is unlikely to give up on the BJP's contentious social media strategies in the lead-up to the elections, considering its previous achievements. Given this anticipated polarization, businesses who have an existing online presence in India or are aiming to join the Indian market should assess their possible vulnerability to social media controversies.

Harnessing Technology for Positive Change

1. Strengthening Digital Literacy

By enabling people to critically assess online material, digital literacy initiatives may lessen the influence of hate speech and disinformation. For example, Fact-Checking Initiatives, which disprove popular false news and All News, encourage responsible media consumption. Another is Community Workshops, where participants learn how to identify trustworthy sources and refrain from disseminating divisive material. Given how rapidly the world is changing, digital literacy is increasingly crucial. It enables individuals to learn, navigate the intricacies of the online world, and participate effectively in the digital economy. India must conquer the formidable challenge of bridging the digital divide and increasing the degree of digital literacy across its varied populace if it is to realize its ambitious vision of becoming a digital powerhouse.

In India, digital literacy encompasses more than just using a computer and the internet. Digital literacy is more than simply a skill if individuals and society are to thrive in the digital age. It requires not just technical proficiency but also critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as ethical concerns while using digital technology. Digital literacy encompasses a range of skills necessary for effectively navigating the digital environment. Digital literacy is crucial in many ways in the modern world. First of all, functional literacy include basic abilities such as utilizing software and internet. The appropriate evaluation, interpretation, and use of digital information are all aspects of information literacy. The foundation of media literacy is the ability to critically comprehend and assess media content, including images, videos, and news articles, in order to spot biases and mistakes. Another subcategory of digital literacy is cyber security, which includes knowing how to protect devices and personal information online and the threats they pose. Social literacy includes digital etiquette, understanding online communities, and acting responsibly and ethically in online interactions. The ability to create digital material, such as websites, images, and films, using a range of tools and platforms is the last component of creative literacy.

2. Encouraging Ethical Practices among Tech Companies

Social media companies like Algorithm must include moral standards to lessen damage and encourage positive dialogue. Transparency, which is Businesses should reveal how algorithms rank material so that consumers may make educated decisions, such as material Moderation, which is Investing in human moderators and AI-powered technologies may aid in more efficiently identifying and eliminating hazardous material. Technology and societal changes have a significant and complex effect on secularity. Modern communication technologies and easier access to information have made it easier for secular ideas to proliferate and for people to consider a wider variety of worldviews. Online forums and social media have made it possible to have candid conversations on issues of faith and belief, often going against established religious conventions.

A more secularized lifestyle has resulted from the quick speed of technological advancement, with many facets of everyday life becoming more and more divorced from religious influence. These developments have broadened the scope of secularism and encouraged diversity of thought, but they have also brought forth new moral and ethical conundrums that secular ethics must address, as well as the necessity of finding a balance between upholding social cohesion in a world that is becoming more and more secularized and respecting individual liberties.

3. Supporting Inclusive Content Creation

Collaborative Projects, which are cross-cultural partnerships in media production that highlight the advantages of diversity and tolerance, and Funding Initiatives, which are grants for creators producing inclusive and educational content, are two examples of how promoting content that encourages secularism and coexistence can change public discourse towards empathy and understanding. Secularism and a consistent legal system are defining characteristics of social advancement and growth in the fabric of human civilization. Religion currently has an impact on

both sacred and secular life, despite its origins as a reaction to the transcendent. Nonetheless, religion should only exist in the holy sphere, acknowledging that, despite their overlap, worldly and religious life are different. Particularly in pluralistic cultures, it is important to distinguish between these domains, which vary in nature, manner, and purpose. For peaceful cohabitation, it is necessary to address the complicated issues that arise from failing to recognize this divide. It is necessary to address these problems with conceptual clarity and thorough logical analysis in order to distinguish their differences and relationships. This is particularly important when thinking about a Uniform Civil Code that would regulate everyone's secular concerns. Such a code is a logical recognition of the need and value of legal uniformity in certain spheres of life, not an attempt to force it on reluctant groups of people.

Even while these problems are essentially social, these viewpoints often give them religious and political aspects. They relate to the ways of living of a religiously diverse community in which distinct groups follow varied sets of beliefs and customs that are often cited as being approved by religious tradition. These issues, however, are not fundamentally spiritual in a secular context, and religion shouldn't control civic life. In contrast, civic life in theocratic states is inseparable from a certain religion. Whether secularism is defined as equal respect for all religions, equidistance from all religions, or indifference to all religions, the boundaries between religious and civic life must be clearly defined. Although the many facets of human existence cannot be completely separated since it is an organic totality, they may and should be recognized and dealt with individually as needed. This is comparable to how various organs inside a body may be inspected and treated separately for medical reasons even if they are interrelated.

Making religious divisions between majority and minority groups complicates the implementation of a uniform civil code. Such disparities are irrational in a fully secular regime since the idea of secularism itself forbids them. But as vested interests solidify, actual realities often deviate from rational goals. These sociological questions often have political overtones in democracies with lower educational attainment and widespread vote-bank politics. Self-styled defenders of religion may take advantage of the general public's religiosity by misleading them into thinking that these problems are inextricably linked to their religious identity. For electoral purposes, political leaders may then look to these religious leaders for solace.

4. Building Global Frameworks

To confront the worldwide threats that technology poses to secularism and cohabitation, such as via Policy Agreements, international collaboration is crucial. Through cooperative regulations like Capacity Building, which allows NGOs and governments to assist grassroots efforts to utilize technology for advocacy and peace building, initiatives like the Christchurch Call aim to combat online extremism. Researchers have found a broad range of church-state ties as well as legal, institutional, and political structures associated to state-religion linkages. Religious diversity is still a major problem both within and within various parts of the globe today. Different normative concepts of secularism and state-religion ties and links have resulted from these differences in kind and degree, which are partly due to unique political, institutional, theological, and historical legacies. This first contribution starts by outlining the foundation of current ideas on secularism and the relationship between the state and religion. First, our debate evaluates normative views that come from both "the West" and non-Western viewpoints (like India), which may directly contradict the former. After that, it presents a new framework of five ways to control religious diversity, each of which is characterized by a set of norms or essential traits that set it apart from other approaches. The geographically focused contributions to this collection give comparative assessments both within and across regions, based on this taxonomy of modes. Lastly, we provide a summary of these contributions and how they use the typology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media and technology have drastically changed the terrain of religious harmony and secular principles. On the one hand, these forums encourage the dissemination of secular ideals like free speech, individual liberties, and reasoned debate. It is now simpler for individuals from various cultural and religious backgrounds to communicate, share ideas, and question conventional wisdom because to the internet's ability to link people worldwide. As a consequence, secularism has become more popular in many nations, especially in areas where internet platforms often surpass the power of religious organizations in facilitating conversations about social justice, human rights, and governance. The emergence of social media and technology, however, also poses problems for religious harmony. By magnifying extreme viewpoints and encouraging intolerance, these platforms may exacerbate differences even while they have the capacity to promote discourse. Because of the internet's anonymity and reach, hate speech, religious fanaticism, and disinformation may proliferate, impeding productive dialogue and escalating tensions between opposing ideologies. Furthermore, there may be conflict between the secular and religious sectors as a result of the quick spread of secular principles, which are sometimes seen as eroding religious values.

In the long term, social media and technology have a complicated and two-edged impact on secular values and religious cooperation. Both secular and religious organizations must actively work to manage the possible threats, even if it may promote better understanding and tolerance. Responsible use of technology is essential for fostering polite discourse, understanding amongst people, and the acknowledgment of universal human values that cut beyond religious and secular boundaries. Social media and technology have enormous influence on how society views secularism and religious tolerance. Although they have promoted interfaith understanding and democratized information access, their abuse presents serious threats to social peace. Governments, IT firms, and civic society must work together to address these issues. We can use technology's revolutionary power to create a society where religious and secular values live peacefully by advancing digital literacy, moral behavior, and inclusive content.

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