Voices and Views: A Survey on the Role of Social Media, Civil Society, and Democracy in Anand, Gujarat.

Theme: Role of Media, Civil Society, and Public Discourse in Strengthening Democracy.

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Abstract

In recent times, social media has emerged as a crucial platform for expression, political consciousness, and civic engagement. Social media, together with civil society organizations, significantly influences democratic conversation, particularly at the local level. This study explores how social media and civil society contribute to enhancing democracy in the Anand district of Gujarat. The research relies on primary data gathered via a structured questionnaire given to members of the public and professionals in the media field. The results indicate that social media has heightened political awareness and citizen engagement, while a deficiency in media literacy still impacts democratic values. The research finds that the mindful use of social media and the proactive involvement of civil society are boosting grassroots democracy

Keywords: Social Media, Civil Society, Democracy, Public Discourse, Anand, Gujarat.

1. Introduction

Democracy relies on knowledgeable citizens, the liberty of expression, and engaged public involvement. Historically, newspapers, radio, and television have been significant in educating the public. Nonetheless, the growth of social media has changed the democratic system by offering citizens direct access to information and avenues for expression.

In India, social media sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are commonly utilized for discussing political, social, and community matters. In areas such as Anand, Gujarat, social media has allowed regular individuals to voice concerns, express opinions, and participate in civil society efforts. Civil society groups also utilize social media to raise awareness, engage individuals, and enhance democratic involvement.

This research examines how individuals in Anand view the influence of social media and civil society on enhancing democracy and what obstacles they link to digital democratic participation.

2. Review of Literature

- Social Media's Influence on Indian Democracy

Dr. Arvind Kumar Shukla (2024) in his study "Indian Democracy: Impact of Social Media and Digitization" emphasizes that the arrival of social media has fundamentally alterned democratic participation, public opinion formation, and political engagement in India. The paper highlights that digital platforms have enabled wider political discourse, greater citizen outreach, and increased accessibility to information, while also presenting challenges such as misinformation and polarization. This reflects that social media has become both a democratic tool and a source of digital disruption in contemporary Indian politics.

- Role of Social Media as New Public Sphere

Research Digonto Banerjee and Shivendu Rai highlights that social media in India functions as a new sphere, widening democratic participation beyond traditional media. This study shows that online platforms provide space for grassroots activism, marginalized voices, and politically engaged citizens, while also addressing risks such as polarization and digital exclusion. It underscores how social media reshapes public discourse and creates new democratic arenas.

- Social Media in Political Champaigns (2025)

A paper in IJCRT argues that Indian democracy is now experiencing digital populism, where social media becomes the dominant means for political engagement. It explains how platforms are used for direct political messaging, mobilization, and community building, altering traditional campaign dynamics. While this can democratize information, it also raises questions about transparency, accountability, and deliberative public conversation in electoral politics.

- Opportunities & Challenges of Social Media (2024)

Dr. Abhay Vikram Singh, Dr. Manoj Kumar, and Dr. Dinesh Vyas (2024) discuss how social media has democratized political engagement in India. Their study shows that platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook enable real-time feedback, grassroots mobilization, and political participation, especially among youth. However, the research also highlights risks such as misinformation, propaganda, and manipulation of public opinion emphasizing the need for policy and educational responses to safeguard democratic integrity.

- Civil Society and Indian Democracy (JSTOR)

A study on JSTOR examines civil society as an agent of social transformation in India. It argues that civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating rights, forming citizen networks, and holding power accountable, contributing to democratic resilience and inclusive governance within Indian political culture.

- Various studies highlight the growing influence of social media on Indian democracy. Researchers argue that social media has expanded political participation, enabled grassroots activism, and created a new digital public sphere. At the same time, scholars also point out challenges such as misinformation, echo chambers, and political polarization. Literature on civil society emphasizes its role in promoting accountability, citizen awareness, and democratic values. Together, existing studies suggest that while social media and civil society strengthen democracy, their impact depends on responsible usage and media literacy.

- **Research Gap:** Most existing studies focus on national or metropolitan contexts of social media and democracy. Very limited research examines the combined role of social media and civil society at the district level, particularly in semi-urban regions like Anand, Gujarat. This study attempts to bridge this gap by providing a localized, empirical analysis.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the idea that social media and civil society together influence public discourse, which in turn strengthens democracy.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Social Media + Civil Society → Public Discourse → Democracy

4. Objectives Of the Study

1. To examine the role of social media in strengthening democracy in Anand.

2. To study the contribution of civil society through social media.

3. To understand public perceptions regarding social media and democracy.

4. To identify challenges related to social media use.

5. To analyze the impact of social media on democratic public discourse.

5. Research Methodology

5.1   Research Design
The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on a survey method.

5.2   Area of study
Anand District, Gujarat.

5.3   Sample Size
Total respondents: 144

5.4   Sampling Technique
Convenience sampling.

5.5   Tool of Data Collection
A structured questionnaire considering of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. (Questionnaire including questions on social media usage, democracy, civil society, challenges, and youth participation.)
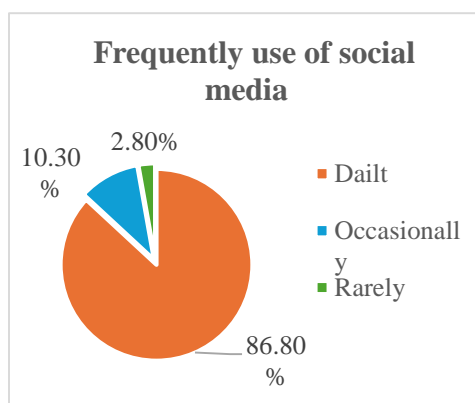
5.6   Tool Of Data Analysis
Percentage method, tables, charts, and diagrams.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chart 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

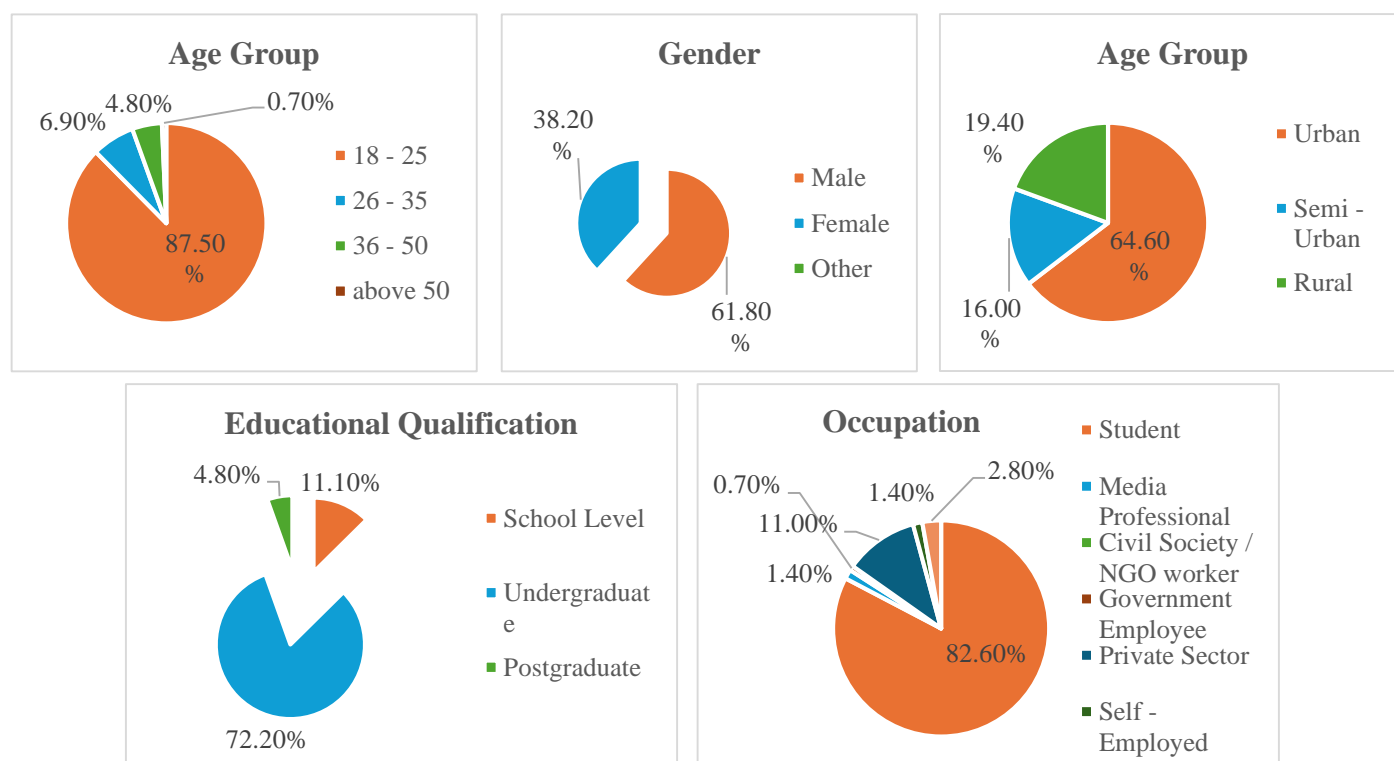**Q. Age group, Gender, Area of residence, Educational qualification, Occupation?**

Interpretation:

The demographic data shows that a large proportion of respondents belong to the 18–25 age group, indicating strong participation from youth. Both male and female respondents are adequately represented, ensuring balanced opinions. Most respondents are from urban and semi-urban areas, suggesting better access to digital platforms and higher social media usage. The dominance of students reflects the increasing role of young citizens in online democratic engagement.

Chart 2: Frequency of Social Media Usage

Q. How frequently do you use social media?

Interpretation: The majority of respondents use social media daily, showing that it has become an integral part of everyday life. This high frequency supports the idea that social media is a powerful medium for information sharing, political awareness, and public discourse.
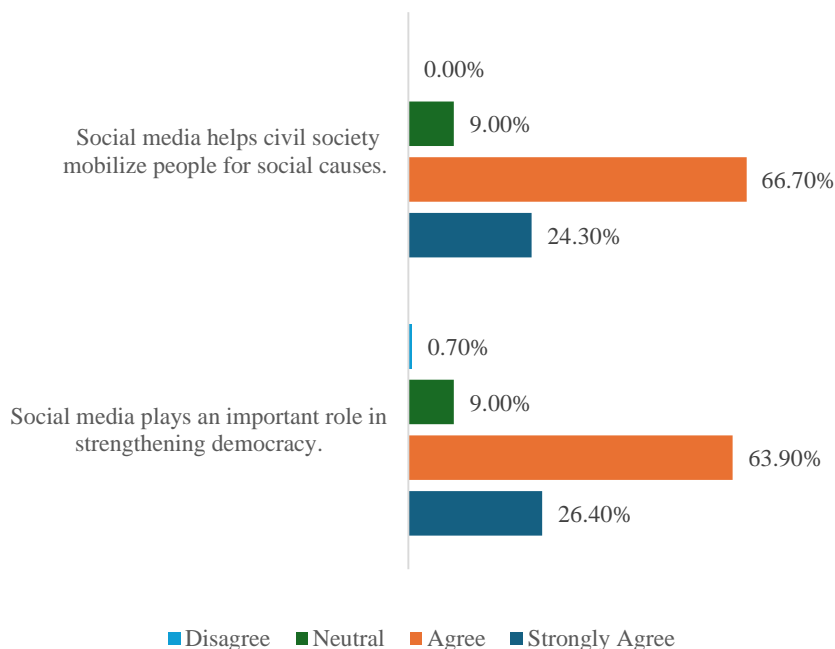
Perception of civil society's role

Chart 3: Most Used Social Media Platform

Q. Which social media platform do you use the most?

Interpretation: The findings indicate that WhatsApp and Instagram are the most popular platforms among respondents. This shows that instant messaging and visual platforms play a crucial role in spreading political information and discussing public issues at the local level.

Platform used most
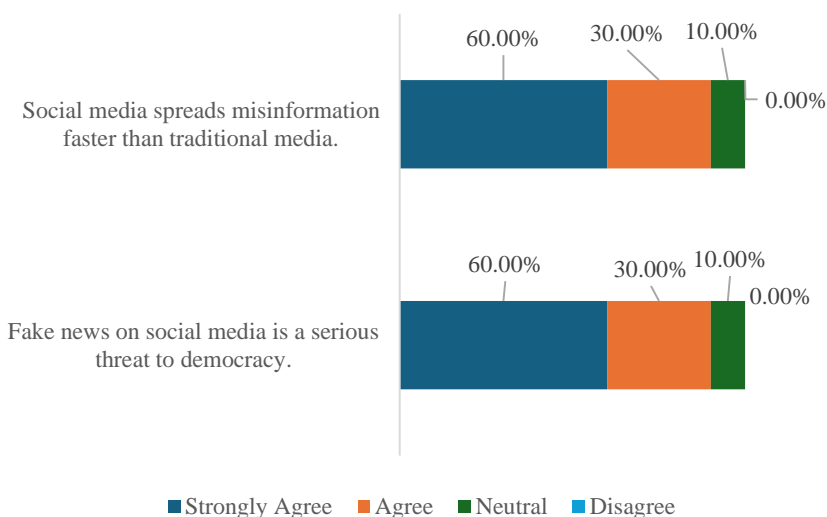
Threat perception

Chart 4: Role of Social Media in Strengthening Democracy

Q. Social media strengthens democracy, Social media increases political awareness and Social media provides free expression of opinions and Social media highlights local issues?

Interpretation: A large number of respondents agree or strongly agree that social media strengthens democracy by increasing political awareness and providing freedom of expression. Respondents also feel that social media effectively highlights local issues of Anand, thereby encouraging citizen participation in democratic processes.

Chart 5: Role of Civil Society and Social Media

Q. Civil society plays an important role in democracy and Social media helps civil society mobilize people

Interpretation: The data shows strong public belief in the importance of civil society for democratic development. Social media enhances the reach of civil society organizations by helping them mobilize people, spread awareness, and encourage participation in social and democratic initiatives.
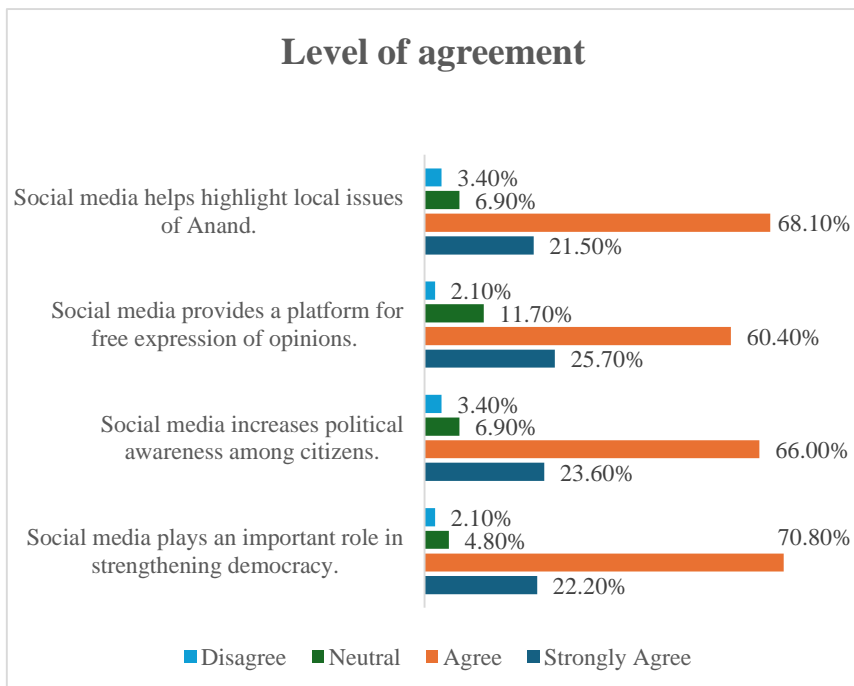
Level of agreement

Social media helps highlight local issues of Anand.
- Disagree: 3.40%
- Neutral: 6.90%
- Agree: 68.10%
- Strongly Agree: 21.50%

Social media provides a platform for free expression of opinions.
- Disagree: 2.10%
- Neutral: 11.70%
- Agree: 60.40%
- Strongly Agree: 25.70%

Social media increases political awareness among citizens.
- Disagree: 3.40%
- Neutral: 6.90%
- Agree: 66.00%
- Strongly Agree: 23.60%

Social media plays an important role in strengthening democracy.
- Disagree: 2.10%
- Neutral: 4.80%
- Agree: 70.80%
- Strongly Agree: 22.20%

Legend: ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Figure 6: Challenges of Social Media

Q. Fake news is a serious threat to democracy ands Social media spreads misinformation faster?

Interpretation: Most respondents express concern about fake news and misinformation. While social media strengthens democracy, the rapid spread of unverified information can mislead citizens and negatively affect democratic decision-making.
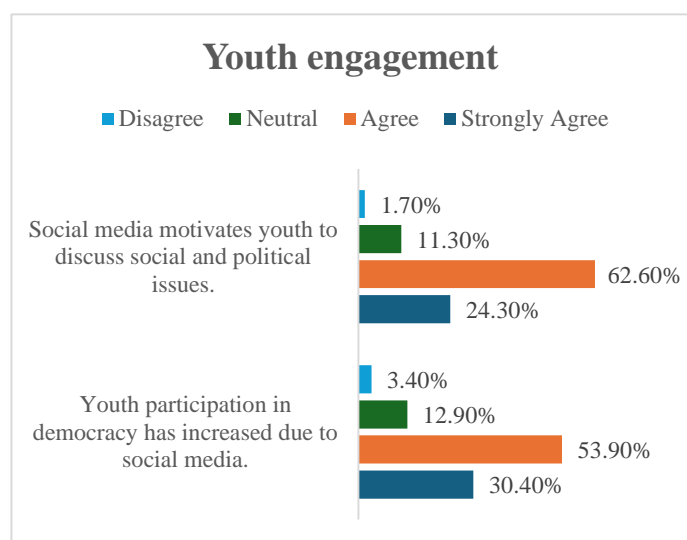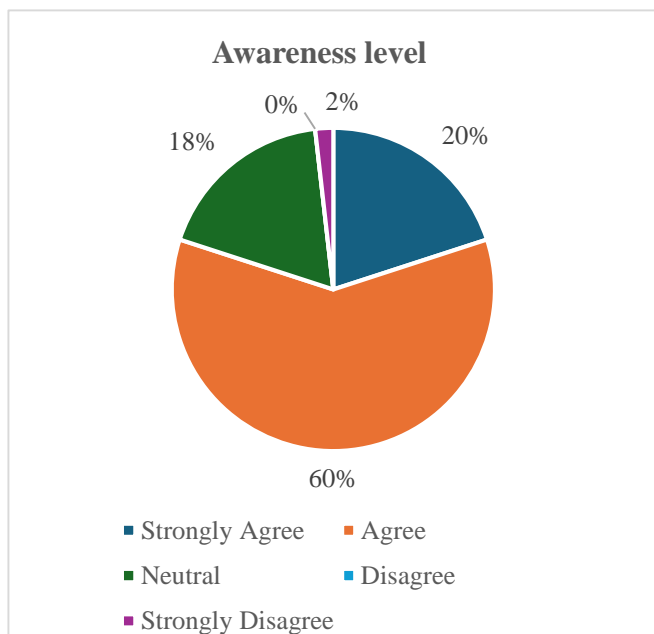

Youth engagement

Legend: ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Social media motivates youth to discuss social and political issues.
- Disagree: 1.70%
- Neutral: 11.30%
- Agree: 62.60%
- Strongly Agree: 24.30%

Youth participation in democracy has increased due to social media.
- Disagree: 3.40%
- Neutral: 12.90%
- Agree: 53.90%
- Strongly Agree: 30.40%

Figure 7: Youth Participation in Democracy

Q. Youth participation has increased due to social media and Social media motivates youth to discuss issues?

Interpretation: The majority of respondents believe that social media has increased youth participation in democratic activities. It motivates young people to discuss political and social issues, making them more aware and involved in democratic processes.

Figure 8: Awareness of Democratic Rights

Awareness level
- 20%
- 60%
- 18%
- 0%
- 2%

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Q. Social media has increased awareness about democratic rights and duties, and public issues?

Interpretation: The data clearly indicates that social media plays an educational role by increasing awareness about democratic rights, duties, and public issues. This contributes positively to informed citizenship and democratic participation.

Figure 9: Active Democratic Participation

Q. Social media encourages active participation in democratic activities like discussions, campaigns, or voting awareness?

Interpretation: A significant portion of respondents feel motivated by social media to actively participate in democratic activities such as discussions, campaigns, and voting awareness. This confirms that social media functions as both an information platform and a catalyst for civic engagement.

7. Role of Social Media in Strengthening Democracy

The survey responses indicate that social media has significantly contributed to political awareness and public engagement in Anand. Citizens use social media to follow local issues, express opinions, and participate in discussions. Youth participation is particularly high, as young people actively engage with democratic content online.

8. Role of Civil Society in Democratic Development

Civil Society organizations in Anand use social media to conduct awareness campaigns, mobilize citizens, and promote democratic values. Respondents acknowledged that civil society plays a crucial role in strengthening democracy, especially when supported by digital platforms.

9. Challenges and issues

Despite its positive impact, social media also presents challenges. A large number of respondents identified fake news and misinformation as serious threats to democracy. Political polarization and lack of regulation were also seen as major concerns.

10. Findings of the Study

- Social media is widely used in Anand for news and public issues.

- It has increased political awareness and democratic participation.

- Civil society organizations effectively use social media for outreach.

- Fake news and misinformation pose serious democratic challenges.

- Media literacy is essential for responsible social media use.

11. Suggestions

- Promote media and digital literacy among citizens.

- Encourage ethical and responsible use of social media.

- Strengthen collaboration between media and civil society.

- Develop balanced regulation without restricting freedom of expression.

12. Conclusion

This Study concludes that social media and civil society play a vital role in strengthening decocracy in Anand, Gujarat. Social media has expanded public discourse, increased citizen participation, and amplified local voices. Civil society organizations have effectively used digital platforms to promote democratic values. However, challenges such as misinformation and polarization must be addressed to ensure healthy democratic growth. Responsible social media use and active civil society engagement are essential for sustaining democracy at the grassroots level.

13. Limitations of the study

- Limited geographical area (Anand district only).

- Sample size constraints.

- Time limitations.

14.   Scope for further Research

- Comparative studies with other districts.

- Long-term impact of social media on democracy.

- Role of youth in digital democratic engagement.

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