

The Unfortunate Alliance of Partisan Politics and Resentful Relationships

Ananya Chaure

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, Symbiosis International (Deemed University)

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Abstract

Discourse on the polarisation in Indian politics has been increasing over the years, fuelled by the digital age. However, the subsequent effect of this polarisation upon relationships remains largely unexplored. There is a lack of research upon the impact of divisive political views upon relationships, and family dynamics in particular. This paper bridges that gap by studying the effect of such factors in the Indian setting, lending support to the fact that Confirmation Bias, Media Exposure, Sensationalization and Fake News create and concretise polarising views; and in turn examines the impact of such views on familial relationships. The knowledge gained from this investigation advances our understanding of the social ramifications of media-driven political divisiveness in India. The results point to a significant relationship between the rise of divisive political viewpoints and media saturation, particularly in the digital sphere. Furthermore, the paper critically analyses individuals' perception of opposing political views within the family and inter-generational differences regarding the same.

Keywords: media exposure, polarised politics, familial relationships, confirmation bias, echo chambers, inter-generational differences, Indian subcontinent

The inflammatory relationship between media and politics is fundamental and intrinsic to human culture, forming one of the most essential and longstanding associations. One furthers the other, intertwining them together as co-conspirators in the market of life.

Today, we see this coalition grow and strengthen in nature more than ever before, with wide-ranging effects. Advertisers and organisations alike have weaponized media as a medium to further their agenda. Political media propaganda is ever-evolving and inescapable; therefore, it is bound to have a lasting impact on our lives. It is this very phenomenon that the researcher wishes to cover, as the differentiating factor between previous political propaganda and the current is the sheer unforeseen volume and intensity.

As of 2023, India has 833 million active Internet users, 400 million newspapers in circulation (even post-pandemic), 392 news channels (operating predominantly on ‘Breaking News’ models) (BBC, 2023). 73% of the population access news conveniently and on-the-go through their smartphones (Reuters, 2021). With such a degree of connectivity and immediate access to a variety of news and corresponding opinions, one can conclude that there is significant media exposure present in India today. In addition to these traditional news sources, active social media penetration is 33.4% (Forbes, 2023), adding to the same. It is worth exploring whether there is a correlation between this media prevalence and strikingly varied political views present in the country today.

The intense polarisation has been described as likely to have “catastrophic” effects on India. Interestingly, Kar (2022) has a unique take on the polarised political climate today, calling it the result of seeds sown in the previous decade as well as the tactics of the current government, highlighting the compound effect produced. He also states that because of growing group grievances and more polarised elites, social cohesiveness and fragility have increased in severity. In line with this, it can be said that while the origin of a divide may be traced back to a few decades ago, it has gathered unprecedented steam and momentum in recent years and has resulted in glaring political battle lines.

Families in India are facing the brunt of this deadly discord. Moulding young children’s minds is very simple, and in their fundamental growing stage, their families are their go-to for answers to all questions. This is even more so in India, where close-knit communities, collectivistic culture and deeply emotional family dynamics centred in longevity of relationships are predominant. We often see numerous discussions about dynasty dependency or vote-bank politics that occur over decadent gulab jamun or a cup of chai. Indians adore ‘talking politics’ – it is not uncommon to see uproar over political alliances break up a perfectly good dinner-party, or get an inside view of bonding over the latest political scandal. But while the political conversations may be robust, we now commonly see a shift in the nature of these discussions as they take on a darker undertone – something that may spell trouble. There is no denying the diametrically opposite views that exist

within the country today, nor the arguments that arise due to the same. However, it is the need of the hour to see whether such opposing views are creating an impact upon familial relationships, and to what extent this impact may be.

The author's interest lies in this area as it is a relatively unexplored field and one that will have important implications upon society and social perception in the coming years. The development of extremist political views and debates arising over the same amongst loved ones, is a widespread occurrence with long-lasting and harmful implications that is not being spoken about enough. To that extent, the present study delves into pre-existing bodies of research to better understand the contributing factors of polarisation and its subsequent impact.

Media Exposure and the subsequent rise of Polarisation

Prasetya and Murata's study utilises a model of opinion dynamics and studies the role of media exposure in propagating extremist views (Prasetya & Murata, 2020). Qureshi et al., (2022) references the role of narratives and sensationalism as persuasion strategies in the U.S.A. Investigating social media specifically may prove to be the key factor for the increase in polarised opinions in recent times (Lott, 2014). Qureshi et al., (2022) references the role of narratives and sensationalism as persuasion strategies in the U.S.A. Investigating social media specifically may prove to be the key factor for the increase in polarised opinions in recent times. (Lott, 2014)

Echo Chambers and Confirmation Bias

When we speak of echo chambers and confirmation bias as players in the political landscape, Pariser introduces the concept of a 'filter bubble', described as a "unique universe of information for each of us". It combines the idea of social media users as a commodity, bid upon by buyers wishing to influence their choices and views. (Pariser, 2011) This, subsequently known as an echo chamber, has been found to strengthen polarised views as it furthers negative sentiments such as targeted anger and hatred. (Halversen, 2021; Cardenal et al., 2019) The concept of 'selective exposure' reiterates the message of repetitive beliefs, cementing the role of Confirmation Bias. (Stroud, 2008)

Effect on Relationships

Iyengar (2019) highlights the increasing prevalence of strong opposing political opinions and hatred amongst Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.A, termed as affective polarisation. Similarly, Warner, et al., (2021) explores the effect of differing political opinions upon familial relationships.

Building upon the existing body of research, this study aims to solve the issue of pre-existing U.S-centric research by choosing a target audience within the Indian subcontinent.

The research question being explored is: Does constant media exposure contribute to the formation of polarised political views that impact familial relationships in India? The objectives of the study are:

1. To study the role of Confirmation Bias in solidifying certain views through the factors of Exposure, social media Echo Chambers and Immediate Validation
2. To study the role played by Sensationalization of news and political matters, Artificial Intelligence and Fake News in the development and concretisation of views
3. To subsequently understand the impact of the divergent and opposing views formed upon individuals' familial relationships
4. To investigate whether there are any inter-generational differences with respect to the impact of these views

Methodology

In this research, a combination of primary and secondary sources was employed. First, the Case Study method was used to explore two case studies in order to understand whether polarised political views are being formed, along with the extent to which they may be. Secondly, considering the numerous psychological and societal aspects, a Field Survey was conducted in order to gain practical and firsthand knowledge.

Case Study

Objectives 1 and 2 were studied with the help of two case studies of two major political events that have occurred in India in the recent past were done; The Abrogation of Article 370, 2019 and the India-China Galwan border clash, 2020

Additionally to address objectives 3 and 4, a field survey was conducted. The researcher measured the role of constant media exposure in the development of extreme views and whether they may lead to interpersonal issues on a case-to-case basis, allowing room for subjectivity. The survey consisted of 21 multiple choice questions with comprehensive answers to choose from. The survey tool comprised two sections wherein the first section collected data about their general policy regarding political discussions, while the second section collected data with respect to their personal perception of politics and familial relationships.

Study Population:

Indian citizens (male, female) aged 18-70 years.

Case Study Analysis

RO 1: To study the role of Confirmation Bias in solidifying certain views through the factors of exposure, social media Echo Chambers and Immediate Validation

Case Study 1 aims to examine Research Objective 1.

Confirmation Bias is a psychological term which states that people tend to process and store information that is in agreement with their pre-existing beliefs. Constant exposure to media sources plays a vital role in propagating this bias, creating an impact by the volume of content available for consumption.

This gives rise to social media Echo Chambers, where interaction with a particular type of content ensures repeated exposure to the same and cements the pre-existing views. One of the key tools of media utilised in political spheres for propaganda is social media. It is built in such a manner that the algorithm shapes itself as per a person's interactions. The more a person interacts with a particular type of content, the more they will see that content across their feed. This feeds into their beliefs and reiterates the same message to them. Additionally, they are likely to follow those people who subscribe to similar opinions. They repeat the same through their platforms and thus the consumer is stuck in an eternal echo chamber, all the while feeling that they are expanding their horizons and learning more and more reasons why their ideas are correct. Since a major part of socialisation has become through social media, many people continue to derive all their opinions from there due to lack of interactions with people with opposing opinions. Again, confirmation bias plays a role.

A supplementary factor is that of Immediate Validation or Gratification provided through social media. A key feature of social media is its instantaneous nature. People are able to obtain replies and reactions within seconds of posting. They begin to view it as – if 'x' people are agreeing with me, there must be some sense in what I am saying, therefore, I am right and my opinion is superior.

When we receive immediate validation through social media in the form of likes and comments, our brain releases dopamine, creating an artificial and short-lived feeling of satisfaction that we begin to crave. People fall into a trap of instant validation and begin to crave the same. Here the rising levels of loneliness, anonymity and increased usage of social media as an easy escape to cope with life's problems plays a role. Most importantly, people feel heard. Thus, many individuals turn to social media to gain that validation that they are missing in real life. Everyone

does not put out their own content – many simply react and comment, as comments can also be liked and replied to – a form of validation.

Case Study 1: Abrogation of Article 370, 2019

“A historic decision”, “Exercise restraint”, “Unconstitutional”, “Adopt peaceful methods and dialogue” – the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir on 5th August 2019 led to mass furore and divided opinions, in the way that most matters regarding Kashmir do. (Chaure, 2021)

Article 370 was incorporated at the time of independence and accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir, allowing it to have its own Constitution, flag and rules. Additionally, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was given the authority to choose who its permanent inhabitants were when Article 35A was enacted. This legislation forbade non-permanent residents from acquiring land in Kashmir and settling there, along with other special provisions and a special status. The Modi-led BJP government abrogated Article 370 in 2019, declaring Jammu and Kashmir as two union territories (J&K and Ladakh) instead of a single state. This also meant that its unique status under Article 35A was revoked, leading to many reforms, such as the removal of property sale limitations and the distinct flag and Constitution, and modifications to the legislation pertaining to residence and marital status.

The news was broken to the citizens of India overnight. Two broad opposing viewpoints came to light in this instance – one that was staunchly opposed to the abrogation, declaring it a tyrannical power move that stripped Kashmir’s autonomy; while the other celebrated the move as long overdue and a much-needed step further towards the country’s complete unity. The two camps began to share and propagate their views on all platforms available.

Now what is interesting about this is that the divide was evident across social media platforms. The presence of a neutral tone hashtag (#Article370) was there only for one hour. 112 hashtags were spawned between 1st August 2019 to 30th November, 2019, with 65 hashtags having a pro-abrogation tone and around 40 hashtags conveying dissent with the abrogation. These 112 hashtags in total discussed issues such as Pakistan’s involvement in J&K and J&K at the UNGA. It has been reported that 87,000 users tweeted 1,87,000+ tweets utilising one out of the 12 pro-abrogation hashtags – however, this does not mean 1,87,00 individuals posted these. Multiple tweets were posted by certain users, i.e. there was not an equitable divide in the number of tweets per user either. It was found that 25% (46,800) of these tweets could be accounted to just 3,134 users, which is 15 tweets per user. (Jaffrelot & Jumle, 2023) This significant group of people are responsible for propagating a particular viewpoint. It also helped that this large number of people all put out similar/same messaging.

The effect of this can be seen through the fact that 2,36,000 users retweeted these messages. The impact group (3,134) accumulated 35.9% of all likes and 41.7% of all replies on this topic. (Jaffrelot & Jumle, 2023) The meaning of these likes and retweets is straightforward – people began to resonate with these viewpoints. The impact group were able to see the effect of their thoughts upon thousands of strangers and this inflated their self-worth while validating their personal beliefs. This in turn emboldened them to put out more tweets in the same vein, and this is where the multiple tweets per user mentioned previously comes into play. The immediate gratification is a natural response to such adulation and support, and this can be seen through the fact that the same users kept tweeting about the issue once they realised that people saw sense and worth what they had expressed. The constant exposure aspect is blindingly apparent through the multitude of tweets (in this instance) that were generated to discuss the abrogation of Article 370. When there is such an overwhelming coverage of a subject, it comes to the forefront of the issues being discussed at that particular time and occupies centre-stage in people's minds.

Now, speaking about the other interlinked instance that comes to prominence in this case – Confirmation Bias. Since the impact group's tweets gained popularity through increased interaction, they began to appear on more users' feeds. Once the users began to interact with such content, they began to see more of it – and so the cycle continued. This is how echo chambers were successfully created. The toxic echo chambers (defined by Pilditch and Madsen as “enclosed epistemic circles where like-minded people communicate and reinforce pre-existing beliefs”) created through immediate gratification and capitalistic social media algorithms worked together to solidify the effect of Confirmation Bias on ordinary users, and thus dictated opinion formation.

Case Study 2 aims to explore Research Objective 2 – the role of news outlets in fanning debates and hatred. Factors such as Fake News (a term we are now well-acquainted with, fake news is dangerous for relationships as it results in confident wrong opinions) also play a significant role in fear-mongering and vilification. The fake news epidemic is severe, with long-lasting repercussions. Not only do people form strong opinions from it, they are unwilling to budge from them even when presented with contrasting and correct information (due to Confirmation Bias and the believability of fake news), arguing that the new information is the one that is fake instead. The blind faith it creates becomes almost impossible to argue against. Fake news has no particular form – while it is true that the older generation is more likely to succumb to believing more obvious forms of fake news, it does not mean that the younger generation is able to escape it. It may be harder to fool the younger generation as they have more knowledge and awareness of the functioning of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the prevalence of untruths, but they still succumb to it. They are more likely to get influenced by viral social media posts on ‘trendier’ platforms such as Instagram and Twitter.

Sensationalism is a term that has been part of debates surrounding news distribution since time immemorial. While the phenomenon has existed for decades, discussions regarding sensational news reporting are more common now because consumers are more aware, and because its prevalence has greatly increased.

India-China Galwan border clash

In 2020, tensions rose between India and China over the issue of the shared Galwan border. This culminated in a confrontation that occurred on 15th June, 2020, near Patrol Point 14 in the Galwan Valley of eastern Ladakh between the Indian Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army forces. (Lee, n.d.) When an Indian patrol encountered Chinese soldiers on a small hilltop, fighting started out and an Indian commanding officer was shoved during the altercation and fell into the river valley. Both sides summoned hundreds of soldiers, who engaged in combat. (Davidson & Doherty, 2020) This resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers.

There was a huge media uproar over the situation since it was the first fatal clash after many years. In the volume of media reporting, there were a lot of factual inaccuracies and a great deal of discussion regarding the issue of fake news.

When we have progressed into an era where physical warfare is considered the last resort, countries have developed their own new ways of nationalistic chest-thumping and macho displays of their power. One such method is through the advent of the weaponisation of social media, utilising modern-day warfare consisting of online disinformation and propaganda. The use of such means is to create a wedge between the public on political grounds just as much as it is to create the global narrative. Currently, deepfakes have the ability to sow doubts in people's minds, diminish and destroy trust, lend support to pre-existing biases, and cleverly manipulate people's opinions.

In this situation, Twitter became the foreground for the discussion of these issues with many fake handles pretending to be Chinese nationals and spreading false information against India. A fake account called 'Cathy Rolanova' (@CRolanova) shared an old image showing an injured soldier being carried by the Indian army. This was actually from 3 months before the altercation (The Quint, 2020).

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Image 1: Cathy Rolanova's tweet

The same account also stated that China had occupied the Pangong Tso Lake and that the Indian government was concealing this information from the public, leading to outcry and accusations of hiding their failures. The image turned out to be an Indo-Tibetan Border Police Camp, but it had served its purpose and stoked a fire amongst citizens. (The Quint, 2020)



Image 2: The misleading map shared

In many such situations, the misinformation schemes followed by the Chinese also gained support from Pakistani Twitter trolls, who utilised this opportunity to amplify and spread propaganda against India within their own networks. (Gauri & Patil, 2023)

There was plenty of fake news from the other side of the debate as well. A video went viral on YouTube, allegedly showing ‘real’ footage of the clash at Galwan where the Indian army is shown to be defeating and ‘kicking out’ the Chinese army. The video was false as it took place during the day, and the clash at night, but it was enough to rouse hyper-nationalistic instincts of false pride within the country.



Image 3: The old video in question

A video showing a funeral for a martyred Indian soldier also did the rounds on social media (40,000+ views), gathering furious and heartbroken responses from enraged Indians; however, it was found that the soldier had died previously in an accident in Leh-Ladakh in May. (BBC,

2020) Since there was no accountability and this was taken as the truth, there was the rise of incendiary feelings amongst people.

Another picture that went viral online was a room full of coffins of what was believed to be the Indian soldiers martyred in the Galwan clash. However, it was soon found that the picture was from 2019 and likely associated with the Pulwama attacks. While this was not confirmed, the time when the picture was taken was definitely prior to 2020. Therefore, we can see yet again how false images were being used to fan nationalistic rhetoric amongst Indians within India. (The Quint, 2020)



Images 4&5: The tweet intended to spread misinformation (L) and the original tweet (R)

Even within the country, these fake videos and posts had a divisive impact. Some felt that they were being circulated widely to present an overly-emphasised image of India's military strength and government support to the military, while others felt that the videos were based in truth and were doing the crucial job of highlighting our armed forces' efforts. Here we can see the seeds of disruption being planted.

The news media also employed sensationalist rhetoric by using those headlines and capturing over-dramatised statements meant to generate sentimental responses. An example of this is PM Modi's statement, "We have the capability that no one can cast an eye on an inch of our territory" – this was widely captured across media outlets. This was followed by statements regarding development in military equipment and handling and also reiterated by Amit Shah's exclamation "I want to say it clearly... till the time the BJP government led by Prime Minister Modi is in

power, no one can capture an inch of our land” and “*Iske liye jaan de denge*” while referring to Aksai Chin. (Yadav, 2020) *Many* felt that it was rousing nationalistic statements in order to serve personal causes and was opportunistic, attempting to highlight the improvement in border military capacity under a certain government. (Gupta, 2020)

The two parties’ opposing rhetoric began.



PM has surrendered Indian territory to Chinese aggression.

If the land was Chinese:

1. Why were our soldiers killed?
2. Where were they killed?



Press Trust of India ✓
@PTI_News



Neither anyone has intruded into our territory nor took over any post: PM Narendra Modi at all-party meeting on Ladakh face-off

8:51 PM · Jun 19, 2020 · [PTI_Tweets](#)



Image 6: Tweets by political leaders

The government was accused of fanning sentiments against China (#boycottChina was trending) without providing clear and precise information regarding the occurrences. This was opposed by others who felt that the military was finally receiving the respect they deserved from ordinary citizens. And so, the debate raged on and on, and Indians argued amongst themselves over an issue where they should have stood united as a country – such is the impact of sensationalism.

In order to examine Research Objectives 3 and 4, the researcher analysed the results of the data gathered through the survey that was conducted. The survey was sent to over 300 individuals, and received 100 valid responses. Of this, 36 respondents identified as Male, 63 as Female, and 1 as Other. Since there was a skewed gender distribution, gender-based variances were not examined while drawing conclusions as it would not adequately represent the gender's feelings and behaviour patterns.

The third question grouped respondents as per their age. Respondents fell into one of four categories: 18-27 years, 28-43 years, 44-59 years and 60+ years (Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Boomers). Within these, Baby Boomers had only 4 responses, therefore, they will not be considered as adequate representatives of their particular age range, considering there are too few respondents to generalise responses.

While attempting to gauge the level of interest and active participation in political matters amongst the respondents, it was discovered that 66% of people planned to vote in the upcoming

2024 Lok Sabha elections, and that 90% of the respondents discussed politics with their family Regularly or Sometimes (47% and 43% respectively). This lay the ground for the study, illustrating that politics is a vital part of human life and interactions in India today, making their way into conversations with family on a routine basis.

In response to the question, '*Do you think your family's political views differ from yours?*', 75% of respondents voted Yes and Maybe, establishing that there exists a variance in political views, and that views are not as easily and clearly aligned as they may have been in the past. There exists a gap in familial views that perhaps was not as prevalent before. Earlier, it was widely accepted that the family can exert a considerable influence upon the children's political views, and that children often adopt these views without much questioning or discussion. (Karakoç, 2000) It was believed to be the primary moulder of the child's political beliefs and ideas. (Turan & Tıraş, 2017) However, as per the responses, it appears that this may no longer be accurate. What must be noted here is that the respondents belong to an upper-middle class background wherein they have adequate access to education and resources to educate themselves on political topics, which also allows them the freedom to debate the same within their households.

When probed further on these differences and whether respondents believed they had an impact upon their relationships with family, 64% emphatically answered in the negative. Gen X in particular had only 4 respondents choosing 'Maybe'. 42% of Gen Z voted for Yes and Maybe, as opposed to only 17% of Gen X. Here the question arises whether both generations are viewing the matter in the same manner, or whether there is a lack of transparency and realisation about the impact of views amongst different members.

Therefore, at this stage, it appeared that people seemed to feel that the varying political views had no impact upon their familial relations, at first glance. It was evident that this belief needed to be investigated to see whether it would still hold when tested further, since respondents may not consider all the nuances while answering just this question as a blanket statement. Thus, the next questions first gathered more data to gauge their reactions in different instances.

In order to further define and gauge how varied political views affected familial ties for those who chose 'Yes' and 'Maybe', the impact was categorised into 3 options: Healthy Debate, A situation where you Agree to Disagree, and Arguments. 32% of individuals replied that the differences in views did not affect relationships in any manner, showing that the majority of people *did* face some issues. Gen Z seemed to have the most difficulty when it came to difference in views, with only 27% of them not feeling any kind of impact. They had the largest responses for 'Arguments' and 'Agree to Disagree'.

However, the Gen X group that would generally comprise some of their parents, did not share this view, with many respondents selecting 'Healthy Debate'.

In order to lend support to the point that was previously illustrated under RO 1 (that which enumerated how divisive politics is supplemented by social media algorithms which create Confirmation Bias and Social Media Echo chambers), the next question was, *'When you come across political content on any social media platforms, does it primarily support your political views or differ from it?'* Here, a clear majority of 80% replied 'Varied, but generally supports my views'. This receives further support from the fact that only 6% replied that they come across content that goes against their views, showing that the curation of political content online is almost inevitable. Additionally, going as per the largely homogenous class background of the respondents, one may draw the conclusion that they are likely to be exposed to a particular kind of information and viewpoints that are widely held amongst their class, therefore resulting in echo chambers and their subsequent effects.

Post this, the researcher sought to understand individuals' online sharing habits with respect to their political views. 61% of respondents replied that they chose not to.

In the remaining 39%, 20 respondents replied 'I think we must use our social media platforms to spread awareness on political issues'. Of these, 15 belonged to the Gen Z category. 13 respondents answered in a similar vein, stating that 'In today's atmosphere, being apolitical is a luxury, thus we must share our political opinions online'. These two views go hand in hand and imply a desire to be vocal about political opinions. It is important to note the Gen Z category seemed to primarily hold this viewpoint, showcasing a difference in mindset compared to both Millennials and Gen X. These two primarily replied against sharing their views online at all (87%), as opposed to Gen Z's 44.8%. This denotes that the younger generation subscribes more to the idea of sharing personal political thoughts on social media platforms. However, one must acknowledge that the respondents have the freedom to debate whether or not they wish to share their views online as they have the luxury of not being directly affected (or affected in a grave manner) by them, owing to their upper-class status.

Zero respondents selected external validation as a factor for sharing their views online, thus probing the question of whether the researcher had overestimated the importance of instant gratification explored in RO 1, also considering that the other options were more relevant to the question posed here.

It is also worth thinking that with 61% overall not wishing to share their beliefs online, does that imply something about current politics' divisiveness? It is with this in mind that we shall proceed to the next question.

Upon examining the results, it was found that 22% of people replied that they do not share their beliefs publicly online in order to avoid arguments, while 31% replied they do not do so in fear

of today's tense political atmosphere. This clearly spells out that we are in a situation in our country today wherein people are wary of sharing political views so as not to ruffle feathers and fear of potent backlash, further confirming the point that there is a tenseness and polarisation being created amongst the people today. Building upon the researcher's previous point, it must be noted that the 31% statistic of those afraid of sharing views because of today's political atmosphere might have been much higher if the study was more class heterogenous.

While so far, the respondents had been asked regarding their thoughts about varied political beliefs' impact on their relations, it was necessary to understand their perception of their family's thoughts about this topic. This was to delve into how individuals viewed their family members' attitudes towards politics, political discussions, dissent in political views, and its impact. The goal was also to ascertain whether the phenomena under RO 1 had a role to play.

Thus, the questions sought to know whether the respondents' family members shared political views and content online, and if yes, what motivated them to do so. It was found that there was a gap in responses in the two questions, with 60% voting that family members did not share content online, but then 7 respondents of that 60% choosing explanations for family sharing content online, despite the previous answer. This could reflect an uncertainty about their family members' sharing patterns.

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Additionally, in relation to the previous concern about the relevance of external validation as a motivator for sharing political beliefs online, here it was found that interestingly, 11% of people *did* select instant gratification from others online as an option. This is to note, because as discussed previously, no one selected the same for explaining their own motivations, but they did feel that it was others' motivation and was responsible for their actions.

This could denote that while it is a motivator for sharing political content, it is not easy to accept it in oneself – therefore, it would make sense to conduct further studies on the role of instant online gratification in the field of political content sharing specifically.

Having explored opinions regarding family members' sharing habits with others online, it's time to delve into their sharing habits with the respondents. 40% of respondents replied that they have a family that shares political content with them, 38% who share it sometimes, and only 22% who do not share it at all. The degree to which political conversations are part of our daily life now can be seen through this. This is vital in depicting the media overexposure with respect to politics, as it can be seen that one does not just find such content on their social media fields or news channels, but also through personal messages such as these.

It is also worth noting that the Gen Z group had 62% of respondents voting yes, Millennials had just 25%, and Gen X had 37%. This means that the younger age group receives such messages much more from their older family members. Further studies could investigate why older people are more comfortable sharing such news with their family compared to the younger generation.

Gen Z is more comfortable sharing their political opinions on social media, largely driven by the belief that politics reflects the person one is; while Millennials and Gen X seem to be more comfortable sharing their political views with just family members. This could point towards an inter-generational difference in approach and variance in the understanding of the significance of politics. This ought to be explored further when it comes to varied understandings of the consequences of polarised politics in familial settings.

Probing further in the same line of questioning, the next question explored if sharing of such content on a personal basis gave rise to discussions of any kind. The results were telling, seeing that across all ages, only 17% voted that no discussions arose, meaning that the remainder engaged in some level of political discussion post content being shared. 15% answered that arguments arose, while 26% said they agree to disagree, denoting that overall, 41% faced unpleasant situations while discussing political matters. 40% answered a healthy debate. When we examine it from an age perspective, Gen Z is more likely to indulge in arguments or agreeing to disagree; while the older audience leans towards healthy debate. What the researcher is attempting to illustrate here is that the younger and older generation may have a gap in their *views* of how polarised political opinions are impacting their relationships. The very same questions were approached in different manners by the younger and older generations, following an identifiable pattern in both their behaviour. The younger generation tended to feel more strongly about the varied opinions, whereas the older generation was willing to view the varied views as less impactful for their relationships.

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the effect of the sharing of political content as discussed, the next question was: *'Do you think these discussions strengthen/weaken your personal views?'* The findings were enlightening, as they indicate the tension that gets created with respect to political discussions and thus showcases their subsequent effect.

43% of respondents stated that family members' point of views didn't affect their personal beliefs, while 38% said that they have to cautiously navigate interpersonal relationships and tread the waters carefully around opposing viewpoints. It must be observed that the 43% who remained unaffected by familial beliefs possessed the luxury to do so, which in part is due to their affluent background. 7% said that they rarely see their family's point of view and cannot accept their beliefs as they did not agree with them at all; 15% said they often saw their family's point of view, did not agree with it, but accepted it to prevent arguments; and 16% said they sometimes saw their family's point of view, but considered theirs more accurate, thus finding it difficult to alter their beliefs. This is quite telling as it shows that the difference in opinions is causing some level of friction. Accepting opposing views without contesting so as to maintain the peace is a direct indicator of the power of politics causing a strain upon relationships. The same is reflected via the 16% that found it difficult to alter their own beliefs, but felt pressured to do so upon hearing their families' thoughts. Only 5% of people were willing to alter their beliefs based on differing views. Lastly, the respondents who could not align their beliefs with their families at all, adds to the same and shows the level of polarisation and divisiveness prevalent today, thus furthering the central point of this paper.

In the final stages of the questionnaire, there was an attempt to obtain a very specific response to the question being explored, questioning *'Has there arisen a situation wherein such discussions/shared content has altered your relationship or perception of your family?'* It was found that 64% voted No, 26% Yes, and 10% voted Maybe. While 64% emphatically voted No, this is not completely aligned with the previous responses where people spoke of accepting beliefs to prevent arguments, and difficulty seeing eye to eye due to the lack of consensus of the beliefs. The understanding of the same is that when asked such a direct question, people find it difficult to be completely honest, for fear of the researcher judging their viewpoint. The stakes are higher with such a question, and as seen previously in questions where the answer could be construed negatively, people tended to answer more diplomatically and cautiously, despite being promised anonymity. We must also observe that amongst the people that voted Yes, 77% belonged to Gen Z, yet again ending support to the fact that younger people might be more ready to accept the toll of these differences than the older people, who either do not notice their family's discomfort or choose not to view it in such a severe manner.

Building further upon the previous question, it was found that 18% of respondents reported feeling angry/uncomfortable in such situations, 8% expressed major difficulty in seeing eye to eye about such matters, and 10% (total 36%) spoke about being unable to discuss any sort of

political matter with family at all, since they have previously affected their relationship adversely.

The reasoning for the familial relationships being unaffected quoted by the remaining 64% was majorly that the arguments that did crop up were small arguments that were resolved eventually. This is to be noted as it implies that while major differences do exist, they do not seem to be causing major rifts that are beyond repair. Suppose this finding is partially due to the diplomacy in responses. In that case, it must be solved through further studies to determine if the findings are replicated and to lend credibility to either side.

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The reason for this is at the same time, the impact of 36% cannot be dismissed and must be studied further with a more diverse audience, with certain questions being restructured in a manner that does not put the respondent on the defensive and instead allows them greater candour. This will enable a more in-depth understanding of the degree and extent of such an impact on familial relations, across generations. Additionally, variances in class must be taken into consideration – political differences resulting in serious rifts may be more prevalent across varied classes due to ideals of honour and respect, and ought to be explored.

Conclusion

Through the means of the two case studies and the results of the survey, it has emerged that the political climate within India today is one that is rather fraught with tension and debate. It is found that political discussions in India are frequent and can become heated, with social media serving simultaneously as a catalyst and an outlet for the same.

It becomes even clearer that the constant access to media creates Confirmation Bias and Echo Chambers on social media platforms, and alternately creates divisive viewpoints within the home. The advent of Fake News, overt news Sensationalization, and the rapid advancements in AI cause a breeding ground for divisive politics in the Indian context, as proved through the Case Study of the Abrogation of Article 370 and the India – China clash in the Galwan Valley.

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Therefore, there is no longer a question as to whether the political atmosphere is polarised within India or not – the resolute faith in one's beliefs alone while being unable to accept the other side is something that is widely found today. It is even clearer that this can be attributed to the easy access to media that is a part and parcel of 21st century existence. With multimedia advertising taking over the general advertising landscape, political advertising is not one to fall behind. Their job is to create an intolerance for dissent and to reduce acceptability and open-mindedness.

This unwillingness and almost inability to be open to varying political stances even within a familial setting has been enumerated through the difficult relations it causes. What is more worrisome still is that the result of these varied views is not being viewed/understood in the same manner across generations, thus causing a communication gap and the burying of these issues rather than tackling them.

We live in a world where new technological advancements occur frequently, and this may further increase news media's prevalence in our lives. However, it is our responsibility to educate ourselves on the role played by media sources in creating political intolerance that leads to rifts. In conclusion, the answer to the proposed research question speaks of a complicated interplay between media consumption, that causes political polarisation, and the subsequent impact on family dynamics. As per the findings, political ideas are sharpened through media saturation in this digital era, in turn contributing to at least some level of heightened tension within familial relations. Although there is not overwhelming agreement for the same, there are seeds that indicate the dissent is likely to grow as time passes. Thus, as we attempt to navigate this intricate relationship, it is essential to make personal attempts, aiming to encourage constructive dialogue and foster healthy discourse.

While that is on a personal level, on a much larger scale, it is the government's responsibility to provide checks and balances that prevent the spread of such misinformation. There is an urgent need to equip citizens with critical thinking abilities and take conclusive steps towards enhancing media literacy, beginning from a grassroots level and permeating to the everyday media users. Educational policies and independent schemes need to be put into place to help facilitate this, as the onus does not simply fall upon the people to educate themselves. Additionally, there is a need for more stringent checks and balances in the digital sphere and more activation participation from the government's IT cell. The sooner checks and balances are implemented, the better it would be for the future of Indian society and the fabric that wraps it together.

Scope for future research and recommendations

The primary drawback of this study was the small sample size with somewhat inequitable gender and age distribution. The research was also largely limited to the upper middle class of India, thus possibly influencing results in a particular manner.

As per the results of the survey, a pattern of the younger generation and older generations viewing the difference in political views with varying levels of seriousness and intensity was picked up, and it would be interesting to see whether it holds true.

There is also a degree of inter-generational difference in individuals' approach to politics and the prospect of sharing political content with the public online, studying which would tell us about the role of instant online gratification in the same.

The nature of the discussions that arise post the dissemination of political content amongst family ought to be explored further.

Lastly, finding an alternative for certain questions/conducting a study with an even greater degree of anonymity would greatly benefit the topic. The scope for further research in this field is vast and likely to bear promising results in the arena of media, politics and sociology in India.

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