Fluidity of Social Media Power Structures Underpinning Public Discourse on Social Media: A Multi-case Study on Twitter Discourse in India

Completed Research

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Abstract

In this article we present the results of a study on the impact of social media on power structures underpinning public discourse. The power of gatekeepers to control the flow of information in a discourse is considered as central to the power structure. Studies on Internet-based media show that although new media helps by-passing traditional media gatekeepers, the structure of the Internet itself helps replicate traditional media power structures in the new media as well. We argue that because of certain technology features of social media the power structures are partially replicated, but also become fluid in terms of the participants occupying key positions in the power structure. We present the results of a multi-case research study of Twitter discourse on various issues of public interest in India. Our results support the propositions made. We discuss the implication of our results and limitation of our methods.

Keywords

Social media, public discourse, gatekeeping, power.

Introduction

Social media, that includes Internet-based applications such as micro-blogs, social network sites, etc., is widely seen as an alternative to traditional mass media in creating, distributing and consuming news (Papacharissi, 2008; Miranda et al, 2016; Vaast et al, 2017). Scholars have studied the consequences of social media on sociopolitical institutions such as political systems, deliberative democracy, electoral politics, etc., (Webster, 2014; Papacharissi, 2008). However, there is limited understanding on how social media changes the structures underpinning the sociopolitical institutions. Studies on early Internet-based media technologies, such as blogs, argued that the new technologies effect sociopolitical phenomena by disrupting the power structure controlling the flow of news content (Benkler, 2006; Hindman, 2008). In this study we extend this line of inquiry to social media applications to investigate how social media effects the power structure controlling the flow of news content. Specifically we investigate how social media affords fluidity to the power structure underpinning public discourse.

One of the reasons, for this lack of clear understanding on how social media is changing the power structures, is that the phenomenon spans a number of research disciplines. Disciplines such as mass communication, political science, sociology, etc., specialize in the sociopolitical phenomenon and do not have theoretical tools to develop nuanced conceptualization of the IT artifact – social media. Therefore despite many studies looking into how social media is disrupting the structure of flow of news content, there is little theoretical development on what particular features of technology effect the power structures (Webster, 2014; Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Thorson and Wells, 2015).

On the other hand disciplines such as computer science and mathematics that do go into the details of the working of the social media technologies, do not concern themselves much about the sociopolitical phenomena social media effects. Information systems is the only discipline that bridges the two streams of academic disciplines as it concerns itself with social phenomena while keeping the technology artifact at the center of analysis (Benbasat and Zmud, 2003; Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001). IS researchers have
looked into the effect of social media on sociopolitical phenomena such as communication during social crises (Oh et al, 2013), organization of collective action (Oh et al, 2015) and connective action (Vaast et al, 2017), and structural changes to public discourse (Miranda et al, 2016). These studies, however, do not look into how social media effects the power structures underpinning public discourse. With our theoretical and methodological foundations in these IS studies, we borrow from mass communication and political science studies to explain how social media brings structural changes to the flow of content in public discourse. Specifically we answer the following research question: How does social media afford fluidity to the power structure underpinning public discourse?

We develop theoretical propositions by extending extant theory on impact of internet-based applications on the structure of mass media. We test these propositions by using a multi-case study method, with India as the social context and Twitter as the technological context for the study. We collected data related to Twitter discourse on four issues of public interest in India. We have extracted data through an API using keyword search. For each case, we present analysis on data extracted using three different keywords. Our results show that though mass media power structure is replicated in social media as well, the power does not necessarily translate into influence over public discourse on social media. Further, individuals who influence the discourse are not same across different discourses. Our results support the central propositions that theorize fluidity in the social media power structure. Further investigations show that affordances of the technology feature “hashtag” explain the fluidity in social media power structures.

Our findings have implications to policy-making and academic research. In the wake of calls to regulate public discourse on social media, our study shows that despite many adverse effects, such as proliferation of fake news, social media does provide for a relatively more egalitarian platform for public discourse. This indicates the need to be careful not to undermine this egalitarian nature of social media in the attempts to curb other negative effects. By providing evidence to show how social media effects the power structure of mass media, we contribute to the theory on impact of new media on public discourse.

Rest of the article is organized as follows. We begin with key definitions in the next section followed by a section on literature review. The section after that presents the theoretical framework and propositions regarding power structure underpinning public discourse. In the sections that follow we present our methodology, data analysis and results followed by a discussion of implications and limitations.

**Key Definitions**

**Mass Media and Social Media**

The idea of mass media originated in the twentieth century (Benkler, 2006). The term reflects the ability of certain technologies such as the newspaper, radio and television to disseminate information to a large audience in the form of text, audio and/or video content. Mass media and its effects on public opinion is the subject matter of the mass communication discipline. Other disciplines such as sociology and political science also engage with phenomenon related to mass media. Sociology concerns itself with mass media as an important institute in modern democratic societies. In political science the focus is on how mass media is used in the context of electoral politics.

We define social media as an ensemble of web-based networked communication platforms that enable participants to 1) establish audience through publicly articulated connections that can be viewed and traversed by humans as well as machines; 2) create news content and distribute it to their connections; 3) interact with and consume streams of news content that is curated by the participant’s connections and by search, filter and recommendation algorithms. This definition is a composite of Ellison and Boyd’s (2013) definition of social network sites and Miranda et al’s (2016) definition of social media. Key differences between traditional mass media and social media include dominance of user generated news instead of curated content created by professionals; networked flow of news content instead of unidirectional flow of news content; and customization of news to individual users instead of a group of audience.

**Public Discourse and Power Structure**

Discourse is a way of communicating experiences from different perspectives. Public discourse is a discourse on matters of public interest, conducted in the public sphere (Habermas, 1993; Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). Public sphere is the English equivalent of the term Öffentlichkeit coined by Habermas. It
is a forum that is independent of the government and autonomous from economic interests and is dedicated to open, rational and critical debates on public affairs. However, in practice the forums for public discourse are not completely independent of the government nor are they autonomous from economic interests. The forums that constitute the public sphere are often harmonized with the interests of the political and economic elite. Mass media is one of the most important forums in the public spheres.

Theoretical Background

There are two basic premises for our study. The first premise is the consensus on the failure of the traditional mass media to constitute a public sphere. The second premise is the debate on whether social media can constitute a public sphere. Given these two premises, it is pertinent to investigate into how social media is changing the power structure underpinning public discourse in the contemporary world. In this section we review the literature that discusses these premises.

**Mass Media and Concentration of Power**

Mass media is considered a vital institution in democratic polity because it constitutes public sphere, a platform for open, critical and rational discourse on public affairs (Webster, 2014; Hindman, 2008; Benkler, 2006). During the second half of the last century, mass media has come under severe criticism for its bias in reporting. There is consensus among researchers on the inherent bias in reporting and progressive fragmentation of the audience (Entman, 2010; Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). The problem is further worsened by progressive consolidation of mass media industry leading to high concentration of ownership of media channels (Benkler, 2006).

The failure of mass media is explained in terms of undue control owners of the media channels have over professional journalists. Journalists, especially those in the roles of the editors, work as gatekeepers to the content that is finally disseminated from the channel. Originally the objective of the gatekeepers is to maintain the credibility of the news channel by allowing to pass only verifiable information that is carefully presented in lucid unequivocal language. However, with concentration of the mass media market, these gatekeepers are compelled to act as the agents of the owners of the media organizations. Thus the owners of the media organizations wield significant power to shape the public discourse through their control over the gatekeepers. This is seen as detrimental to democracy as one of the most vital constituents of public sphere is influenced by economic interests of the owners of the media organizations.

**Internet as the New Public Sphere**

When Internet has emerged as a prominent innovation in the 1990’s, it was believed that the Internet would take over the role of mass media in constituting the public sphere (Benkler, 2006; Hindman, 2008; Papacharissi, 2008). Given its open architecture and the ability to enable people to form loose coalitions, it is expected that it can host open and rational debates (Benkler, 2006; Hindman, 2008).

**Duality of Information Overload and Concentration of Power**

Despite widespread belief in the Internet, early Internet applications, such as blogs and email newsletters, failed to provide a platform for open and rational public discourse. Its failure can be explained in terms of the duality between information overload in the absence of gatekeeping mechanism and concentration of power that results from gatekeeping through search and filter mechanisms (Benkler, 2006; Hindman, 2008). Initially there was a problem of information overload in the absence of gatekeeping roles and rapid proliferation of the blogs. Innovations in search engine technologies allowed users to do keyword searches to extract out relevant content. The search engines are designed to organize content based on different metrics of popularity. This made the more popular websites the gateways of news content on the Internet and their owners the gatekeepers. Since the popular websites are pushed up in the search results, they tend to get progressively more popular, ultimately cementing their place at the top of the search lists. Thus the search engine design eventually led to extreme asymmetry in the popularity of the websites and hence in the power to shape public discourse. The content that goes through a few websites gets most attention, leaving a large number of websites in obscurity. Thus the early Internet technologies merely replicated the power structures existing in the mass media.
Benkler (2006) argues that success of the Internet in facilitating public discourse must not be judged in comparison to the ideal type of public sphere. Instead, Benkler advocates comparison of the new media ecosystem with the ecosystem that existed before the Internet and evaluate its success in terms of the improvements from the traditional media ecosystem. He argues that gatekeeping on the Internet does not necessarily happen through websites that are ranked high by search engines. Instead it happens through certain patterns of use of the internet to create, distribute and consume content. According to him, websites on the Internet cluster around communities of interest. A “local” cluster which when small enough has many moderately connected websites. The websites in a cluster vet the content from each website in a peer-review-like mechanism. Content that is seen as significant makes its way to relatively visible sites in that cluster, from where they become visible to people in larger “regional” clusters. Some of these sites may eventually make their way to a globally connected website and thus gain visibility disproportionately higher than that predicted by its rank in the search engine’s output.

The key take away for us from Benkler is that these communities of interest simultaneously, although partially, solve both the problems of information overload and concentration of power. Their vetting process is analogous to the gatekeeping role played by professional editors in the traditional mass media. On the other hand, this gatekeeping is not done by highly connected users in the network. Instead it is done by a large number of moderately connected actors in the network. He called such an arrangement a “networked public sphere”. This idea was articulated by other authors also – Coddington and Holton (2014) talk about “networked gatekeeping” on similar lines. However, Hindman (2008) refutes this idea through empirical evidence.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Social Media and Fluid Gatekeeping**

Public discourse on the Internet has moved to a different kind of applications, often referred to as the social media. Social media applications “build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: p. 61). Web 2.0 is characterized by its core feature that enables users to interact with web-pages. Social media websites exploit this feature for enabling creation and exchange of user generated content in various forms such as short text messages or posts, multimedia content, meta-voicing content (likes and shares), etc. This reduces the barrier to contribution, and as a result there is an explosion of both participants and content volume.

Despite the increase in the abundance of content on these sites, consumers of content are not burdened with the need to filter the content, especially on social network sites (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). One of the defining characteristics of social network sites is the public articulation of the users’ connections. These connections can be traversed by the user, her connections and even the machines (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). Some of these websites, such as Twitter and Facebook, are equipped with powerful machine learning algorithms that traverse the connections of the user and read the content posted on the website to recommend content to the user. Scholars (e.g., Thorson and Wells, 2015) called this kind of recommendation as algorithmic curation of flow of content on the Internet. This makes gatekeeping process on these sites different from the process in early Internet applications.

**User Network and Latent Gatekeeping Power**

Social media gives its users, the ability to build social networks on the platforms. The connections of a user can influence the content that goes to the user. Thus by choosing the network the user is articulating the choice of the content she chooses to consume. Social media sites are able to recommend content to the users based on the patterns of consumption of their connections (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). Today, social media sites are equipped with advanced algorithms that analyze large amount of data including the users’ consumption patterns, consumption patterns of their connections, volume and velocity of consumption of specific content, etc., to recommend news content to the users. In addition, these sites also provide traditional search and filter tools to enable users to actively filter content. As a result the users on social media encounter a stream of news content that is curated by themselves, their connections and even the site itself (Thorson and Wells, 2015; Ellison and Boyd, 2013). That is, even though there is much more information, users are aided by the machines in filtering out content based on their own patterns of consumption and patterns of consumption of those who are connected to them.
The filtering mechanism described above favors those who are connected to more number of users. Larger the number of connections one has, larger the number of people who are notified by the machine about ones posts. Therefore, users with more connections have the potential to set the agenda for the discourse. We call this inherent ability of the users with large number of connections, or high degree centrality, to set the agenda, as ‘latent gatekeeping power’. We argue that it is very likely that media houses and political leaders, who have power in the offline world have greater latent gatekeeping power in social media also. This leads to our first proposition.

*Proposition 1*: Power structures of traditional mass media are replicated as the latent gatekeeping power structure on social media.

**User Engagement and Manifest Gatekeeping Power**

Higher degree centrality in social media networks ensures greater potential for visibility for ones content. It is does not necessarily ensure greater engagement with ones content and hence greater impact on the public discourse. The amount of engagement with ones content on social media can be measured in terms of the meta-voicing features such as approvals (likes, favorites, etc.) and shares (retweets, shares, etc.). Most social media platforms openly provide the number of approvals and shares for each message. Since the amount of engagement is an actual measure of how the user shaped the discourse, we call this the ‘manifest gatekeeping power’.

**Fluidity in Manifest Gatekeeping Power**

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between latent and manifest gatekeeping powers. The relationship between degree centrality and engagement is mediated by visibility. Having higher number of followers merely increases the visibility, which in turn could lead to greater engagement. Further, engagement through approvals and shares trigger notifications to all the connections of the users who approved/shared the message, thus creating a positive feedback loop between engagement and visibility.

![Figure 1: Relationship between Latent and Manifest Gatekeeping Powers](image)

The relationship between latent and manifest gatekeeping powers as shown in Figure 1 is the cornerstone for fluidity in social media power structures. The positive feedback loop between visibility and engagement makes it possible that under certain conditions, engagement with content becomes self-reinforcing, independent of degree centrality of the user who posted it. An extreme form of such self-reinforcement is called virality. Under conditions of moderate self-reinforcement of engagement, the users with higher degree centrality need not necessarily be same as the users with higher engagement.

Even if the conditions of such self-reinforcement do not exist, visibility can be impacted by other factors that eventually lead to engagement that cannot be accounted for by the degree centrality of the user. For example, users can use technology features such as hashtags to anchor attention to their content (Oh et al, 2015). Usage of such visibility enhancing technology features also can lead to difference in users with higher degree centrality and users with higher engagement.

A weak correlation between number of connections a user has and the amount of engagement she gets, would be an indicator of the situation where users with high degree centrality are different from users with high engagement.

*Proposition 2a*: In a given discourse, users with high degree centrality are not necessarily the users with high engagement with their content.
Proposition 2b: In a given discourse, the number of connections a user has is weakly correlated with the amount of engagement the user’s content gets.

Methodology

We use a multi-case study research method to test our propositions. We use the case method because our research is exploratory in nature and demands in-depth analysis of the relationships between different entities, such as participants, technology features, etc., to reveal the patterns of interactions in the power structure. Further, since we are studying the fluidity in the power structure, we need multiple cases to examine how the patterns are changing from one case to the other.

Context and Cases

An issue of public interest is taken as a case in our study. Since we need to understand the issue and the extent of public interest in it, we chose our country of residence, India, as the social context. Twitter is among the most popular social media websites used for public discourse in India. We therefore chose Twitter as social media context of our study.

We used the Twitter Search API to extract data. The API takes a search string and the number of requested tweets as the inputs and gives out a sample of tweets posted in the last ten days and have that search string as output. Along with the text of the tweet, the API also gives other information pertaining to the tweet and the user. We extracted only tweets ignoring the retweets. For each extraction we set the number of tweets at 50,000. Duplicate tweets were removed in the very first step.

The cases are selected based on trends on the Twitter page of one of the authors. We use the string, e.g. “Republic Day”, in the first round of request. Once we get a set of tweets with this string, we do a frequency count of hashtags (#) to identify the most frequent hashtags used in these tweets. We then use some of the most popular hashtags, e.g., #RepublicDay2019, as search strings in the subsequent requests for tweet extraction. Thus for each case we have multiple sets of data. We call each set of data as a discourse.

We choose the discourse as the unit of analysis because it is a common practice in Twitter to consume content by clicking on a word or a phrase or a hashtag, especially if it is trending. Therefore, examining each dataset separately makes it closer to examining the tweets as they are consumed by an individual user who accessed Twitter at the time we requested for tweets extraction. For this study we chose four cases and three discourses in each case. The details of the cases and discourses are given in the appendix.

Analysis and Results

Connections in Twitter are unidirectional. One can unilaterally follow any other Twitter user. Under default conditions, any activity by a user on Twitter will be notified to all followers of the user. Number of followers, or degree centrality, thus gives a measure of ones control over information flow in the network – the latent gatekeeping power.

Engagement in Twitter can happen in two ways – retweet or favorite, which are measures of the manifest gatekeeping power. Either of these forms of engagement triggers a notification to the followers of the user who is doing the retweet or the favorite. As we will show later, there is very high correlation between the number of retweets and the number of favorites. We therefore use only retweets as a measure of manifest gatekeeping power for our data analysis.

Asymmetry in Power

We begin our data analysis by studying the extent of asymmetry in the latent gatekeeping power and in the manifest gatekeeping power on Twitter. We do this by estimating the probability distribution functions of number of followers and number of retweets. Figure 2 shows the cumulative distribution function of number of retweets and number of followers of all the participants across the four cases selected for this study. These distributions are matched with log-normal and power-law distributions with parameters estimated from the data using Kolmogrov-Smirnov (KS) test. We observe from the figure that both log-normal and power-law distributions reasonably fit with the data. From this we infer that very few
participants in the discourses have very high number of followers as well as get very high number of retweets. This indicates high asymmetry in terms of both the latent gatekeeping power and manifest gatekeeping power in the Twitter discourse.

**Figure 2: Cumulative Distribution Functions of Measures of Power**

In the next step we identify the participants who have asymmetrically high latent and manifest power across the discourses. We identified top ten participants with highest number of followers in each of the 12 discourses. Among the 120 participants falling in top 10 in each discourse in terms of number of followers, there were 51 unique participants. Of these 51, 20 participants appeared in the top 10 in 2 or more discourses. Frequency plots in Figure 3 (a) show these 20 participants and the number of discourses they are there in the top ten. We repeated this exercise with top ten participants with highest number of retweets in each discourse. This had 92 unique participants with 18 of them appearing in two or more discourses. Frequency plots in Figure 3 (b) show these 18 participants and the number of discourses they appeared in.

**Figure 3: Participants with High Centrality and Engagement across Discourses**

We then classified these participants into different participant identity categories based on the descriptions they provided in their profiles. Table 1 gives the distribution of the participants listed in Figure 3 among the different categories we found. We can see that majority of the participants with highest number of followers are media organizations, followed by journalists, political parties and political leaders. The results presented in Figure 2, Figure 3 (a) and Table 1 lend support to Proposition 1 which theorizes that the power structures of traditional media are replicated in latent gatekeeping power structures in social media. Comparing the Figures 3 (a) and 3 (b), we observe that the participants with highest number of followers are different from the participants with highest number of retweets. Further from Table 1 we see that whereas media organizations dominate in terms of latent gatekeeping power, there is no such clear domination in terms of manifest gatekeeping power. This lack of dominance is further corroborated by lower frequencies in Figure 3 (b) than in Figure 3 (a). This lends support to Proposition 2a which says that participants with higher number of connections do not necessarily get higher engagement. At a higher level of abstraction, this supports our thesis that there is fluidity in the power structures underpinning public discourse on social media.
Fluidity of Social Media Power Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Category</th>
<th>Media Organization</th>
<th>Journalist</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Political Leader</th>
<th>Online Media</th>
<th>Political Activist</th>
<th>Other Professions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (Centrality)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (Engagement)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Distribution of Participant Categories

Correlation between Latent and Manifest Gatekeeping Power

We continue our investigation into the nature of fluidity in the power discourse by looking at the correlations between metrics of latent and manifest gatekeeping powers. Figure 4 shows the values of correlation coefficients between the three metrics of gatekeeping power: followers, retweets & favorites. We observe that there is high correlation between the two metrics of engagement – retweets and favorites (\(\text{cor}(RT, Fav)\)), but the correlation between number of followers and number of retweets or favorites (\(\text{cor}(Fav, Fol); \text{cor}(RT, Fol)\)) varies from very low to moderately high. This provides partial support to Proposition 2b, which says that there is weak correlation between latent and manifest gatekeeping powers.

In order to explain the variation in correlation across cases and discourses, we studied the skew in sentiment in each of the discourse. Skewness of sentiment (SoS) is defined as follows:

\[
\text{skewness of sentiment} = \frac{\max[n(\text{+ve words}),n(\text{-ve words})]}{\min[n(\text{+ve words}),n(\text{-ve words})]}
\]

Values of SoS range from 1 to infinity. SoS close to one indicates balance in the number of positive and negative words used in the discourse. Higher values of SoS indicate a skew in the sentiment in positive or negative direction. The discourse in the Republic Day case is essentially made up of messages of good wishes on the occasion. Therefore there is a high skew in the sentiment unlike in the other cases. The closer the value of SoS is to 1, the greater is the contentiousness in the discourse.

Juxtaposing sentiment ratio over the correlation coefficients, in Figure 4, we observe that there is some correspondence between skewness of sentiment and the correlation between number of followers and number of retweets. That is, participants with higher number of followers are less likely to get higher number of retweets in discourses with greater contentiousness. Therefore, latent gatekeeping power does not necessarily manifest as power to get engagement in contentious discourses. Skewness in sentiment not only explains the partial support to Proposition 2b, it also indicates that the power structure is more fluid where it matters – discourses with high contentiousness.

Participation Patterns

In order to explain the fluidity observed in the previous results, we study the participation patterns in different discourses in terms of the number of followers. Within each case, the three discourses differ in the search string used to extract the tweets. The tweets extracted in the first discourse may or may not have a hashtag, since the search string does not have a hashtag. For example in the “Reservation” case, every tweet in the first discourse necessarily has the word “Reservation” but not necessarily a hashtag. In the other two discourses, every tweet must have a hashtag – the second discourse having tweets with at least one neutral hashtag (#Reservation), and third discourse having tweets with at least one hashtag with either a strong positive or negative connotation (#CasteFreeQuota – positive outlook towards the policy).

In each discourse we calculated the average number of followers of the top 100 participants with highest degree centrality. The averages are plotted in Figure 5. We observe that within each case, average degree centrality is higher in discourses with tweets that do not necessarily have a hashtag. That is, participants with relatively lower degree centrality are more likely to use hashtags when they participate in a discourse. We infer that the hashtag feature affords anchor to attention and compensates for the lack of high degree centrality. Similarly, comparing average number of followers in the second and third discourse within
each case, we observe that average degree centrality is lower in the discourse rallying around a hashtag with strong connotation. We infer that hashtags with strong connotations afford anchors to attention to those participants with even lesser degree centrality.

Discussion

The consequences of social media to political communication is an actively debated topic. The issues of “fake news” and “liberal bias” are taking center stage and there are calls for government regulation of social media. While it is important to curb disinformation and systematic bias, it is also important to preserve those qualities that make social media a viable alternative to mass media. Our research informs this debate by pointing out how social media overcomes one problem facing mass media – concentration of power to control gatekeeping. Though our research does not refute the need for regulation of social media, it clearly shows what aspects of social media should be preserved despite regulation.

Our analysis on participation patterns points to how hashtags afford anchors to attention and hence can compensate for relatively lower centrality. These results can be helpful to individuals as well as civil society groups that use social media to increase the reach of their messages. By showing that high degree centrality need not necessarily lead to high reach, we inform them on the need to have a more closer examination of the individual’s ability to enhance their voice.

We contribute to theory in two ways – 1) by highlighting the importance of gatekeeping in the power structure and 2) by classifying the gatekeeping power into latent and manifest gatekeeping powers. Our empirical analysis demonstrates how this classification can be useful in explaining the dynamics of the power structures underpinning public discourse on social media.

Limitations

The theory developed in this article pertains to the impact of social media on power structure. However, our data is limited to the context of Twitter. Further studies are required with other social media contexts. Since the data collected through Twitter Search API gives only a sample of all the tweets having the search string, the interpretation of results and findings should be subject to the limitations arising out of potential sampling errors inherent to the API. In addition, many of the Twitter accounts are automated accounts called bots. We need to test the robustness of our results to presence of bots. Finally we present only descriptive statistics as evidence to our claims in this article. Rigorous causal explanations are necessary to establish relationship between latent gatekeeping power and use of hashtags.

REFERENCES

Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Search Strings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reservation</td>
<td>The lower house of the Parliament passed a bill providing for 10% reservation in higher education and jobs for economical backward upper castes citizens.</td>
<td>Reservation #Reservation #CasteFreeQuota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI Director</td>
<td>Alok Verma, the director of the Central Bureau of Investigation, an independent investigative agency, was removed from the post by the Government of India.</td>
<td>CBI Director #AlokVerma #CBI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafale Deal</td>
<td>The opposition parties have been accusing the Government of India of corruption in making the deal for purchase of Rafale aircraft from a French company.</td>
<td>Rafale Deal #RafaleDeal #RafaleAudioLeak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic Day</td>
<td>Celebrations of the anniversary India adopting its Constitution.</td>
<td>Republic Day #RepublicDay2019 #RepublicDayIndia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A1. Description of Cases and Search Strings used for each Discourse

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Papacharissi, Z. 2008. “The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere, and Beyond.,” in *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, Routledge, pp. 246-261.

