

Mediated campaigns and Unmediated Politics in Millennial India:

A multi-disciplinary workshop youth and new media turn in politics and policy

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The arrival of smart phones, cheaper data packs and social networking sites is seen to have had a major impact on the emergence of new forms of social and political mobilisations. New media and online social networks have also become a ready tool for participation in election campaigns, particularly for the younger 'millennial' demographic which has emerged as a beating heart of protest and public policy today. In spite of the widely held notions about youth disaffection and their general disinterest in politics, younger citizens in India have been at the forefront in the use of media in campaigns across various states while at the same time becoming the visible fist of brutalising politics which seems to evade the institutional framework for democracy. The workshop aims to unpack the rise of social media influencers as a crucial political intermediary, and explore its role in enabling popular mobilisations, in elections campaigns as well as in the context of public policy.

Participants will discuss the ways by which new media provide opportunities for 'unmediated' political messaging, shortening the distance between representatives and represented while encouraging the emergence of new genres of political communication, including satire, memes, virality or *gaali* (insult). The one-day workshop will reflect on the political consequences of online media campaigning, both for political parties and for identity formations that replace traditional institutions that were structured around caste, gender or common grievances. It will pay particular attention to the sociology of the actors who, often hidden behind the screens, are instrumental in recasting political debates and representations: e-citizens, digital advertisers, digital campaigners, digital activists, online gods, community influencers and *trolls*.

Debates will also focus on the consequences of online campaigning on the political cultures of the public sphere, religion and nationalism and try to understand the ways in which these interact with discourse of social policy and development. The focus on new media does not preclude an understanding of the ways in which its modalities link to the older 'mass' media. Instead, we seek to explore how the media system, often coming together through various online and digital platforms, has functioned as an important intermediary in popular and electoral politics. The workshop on mediated campaigns will enrich our understanding of the overlaps, as well as divergences, that have emerged with the rise of new digital media platforms from the earlier era, and how digital inter-mediation plays more and more significant role in enhancing youth engagement and civic participation in particular.

The workshop would focus on contemporary social movements and (not excluding the forthcoming) elections. It will aim to conceptualise, theoretically and empirically – including through the use of computational methods – the phenomenon of mediated campaigning in Indian democracy. Overall, the idea would be to engage researchers across various disciplines, including sociology and social movement studies, political science, mass communication and new media scholars among others, and build a multi-disciplinary framework to understand of the role of new media and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in shaping the contours of what can also be called one of the world's most youthful democracies.

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