

ABSTRACT

Although the leading scholars in the field of new media were quick to point out the democratising paradigm that it brought, the platform's primary function seems to cater towards the fulfilment of commercial interest. Since new media technologies have the potential to change the mechanisms of social interaction and functions, it seems a worthy subject to develop a more fundamental approach to studying new media technologies and their role in society. This research will attempt to study whether the structures of social media platforms promote individual, personalized experiences, or open possibilities for new forms of participation. The idea of new media as a tool for mass distraction highlights a Marxist perspective that provides emphasis on ownership of resources and the idea of who controls the means of production. Proponents of new technology are quick to point out how social media, in particular, has the potential for a new democracy. Because of how quickly and easily content can be shared, new media is seen to have a greater goal of fostering new types of participatory democracy. It is thought to have spawned new types of participatory culture. However, the argument for new media in this research will be focused on the idea that even if new media platforms provide a space for political participation, participation in any of these platforms still support the commercial motivations of the owners of capital. As such, new media technology might have become what research psychologist Larry D. Rosen calls *Weapons of Mass Distraction*. He studied how obsessive different age group are with regards to new media technologies. This research borrows the term but steers clear of the term *weapon* in favour of a simpler, more neutral, less direct expression i.e. *mass distraction*.

When the consumers are the product, the business model demands the constant attention of the consumers on their platforms. The idea of a *prosumer* (a consumer that is the producer of the content they consume) dictates that users remain on the platform for as long as possible. The commercial restructuring has led to an attention economy that derives profit from users' attention. This research, therefore, will try to provide arguments for why it assumes that social media are designed to be distractive and addictive. Hence, the objectives will revolve around whether, despite how it is designed and the true purpose for its existence, social media sites are used for political participation. The intention here is to offer an opinion of social media as tools for political participation while still presenting a critique on what it contributes to society.

The mechanism that brought about online activism in Mizoram had unique cultural foundations. Therefore, political participation, for the purpose of this study, will be concerned with online activism i.e. activism on social media with emphasis on how and what could be the mechanisms that facilitate these activations to take place in Mizoram. The analysis of these events was studied to present a picture of how Twitter was used by the community for political participation.

The study was carried out using Netnography and surveys as research methodologies and Twitter as a site for study. Netnography is a type of ethnographic study that is done on the web. It was suggested by Robert Kozinets and it deals with qualitative research on social media users. Furthermore, in order to study the relationship between social media activism and online activism, and mass distraction in the context of Mizo netizens, two surveys were conducted using questionnaires that were distributed both online and offline. For qualitative analysis, data was collected using NCapture from users' publicly available data on Twitter, followed by customized coding on NVivo software.

In terms of theories, the research employs inductive method to argue for the observations that were made during analysis. A standout model that was used is the *Civic Voluntarism Model* which was used to associate the recruitment process of online activism and the cultural setup that was normative with the Mizo populace. The Mizo *netizens* understood the link between the call for action online and “*Hnatlang*”¹ and that collective action was required to push their own narratives on social media. The analysis of Twitter users also showed that active Twitter users mainly utilize the platform for other things besides activism. In fact, the observations find that users mainly use Twitter to follow celebrities and influencers.

¹ *Hnatlang* - meaning an event that is organised based on ideas of common service for the common good of the villagers which the residents of the village are to render.