Social Media Experiences and Narratives
Formation of Opinions in the Age of Post – Truth

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Abstract: **The emotion and opinion become the pillars of facts and figures in post – truth political condition. The rise of social media and the phenomenon of "my opinion is worth more than the facts" are fundamentals of post-truth. Everybody can publish their opinion and furnish that as facts. The role and structure of public opinion and leaders need to be revisited in this context. In the wake of digitalization and digitization, the social media users become part of big data through which power controllers reshape the policies and democratic values. This paper focuses on narratives of eighteen social media users from Achrol village (Jaipur, Rajasthan) and tries to understand the logic of social media engagement and participation. The paper tries to argue that the big data is subjective and what it quantifies is not closer to objective truth through the narratives of individual datum (users). The paper builds its argument on "opportunities to improve on the truth" (Keyes, 2004) where the anonymity and identity catastrophe in social media helps to disseminate the opinions as facts.**

IndexTerms **- Post – truth, social media, rural India, public opinion, human rights and values, digital life**
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I. INTRODUCTION

Visvanathan (2016) talking about 'post-truth' described that "[it] may be one such word, symbolizing the birth of a politics that returns to the primitive, the primordial and the irrational". When democracy and state governance is related to knowledge and power, the control and distribution of knowledge are vital. The recognition of online medium, especially social media engages the discussion and disclosure of big data and post – truth. This paper is an attempt to narrate the experiences of rural Indian social media users. This study is carried over eighteen individuals of Achrol village of Jaipur (Rajasthan, India). The paper is relevant amidst the discussion and disclosure of big data and post – truth, but it is not an attempt to advocate or oppose the same. On the other hand, this paper devotes space for understanding how the information are conceived by the individual social media user and how they consider them as an entity of the digital age. When the facts and figures turns to be constructed as social media text, the conception and understanding of the information also changes. 'It is easier now. Everything comes on my mobile. Sometimes, though friends or sometimes through people concern itself'. This affirmation from Shyam Lal Gurjar – a tea stall owner of Achrol village – regarding how he gets the news and updates on demonetization ignited the flame of this study. He was mentioning the updates on Facebook and pictorial and textual forwards from his friends. His knowledge of current events and issues were had always validated through such messages. He is so sure that messages are true because it is sent by his friends – and if it is not – it does not matter to him much; and most interestingly – what he does the next. 'I forward it to my friends and groups and occasionally share it on Facebook". During current study, we identified and interacted with more seventeen people like Shyam Lal Gurjar – who are digitally equipped[i]. The interaction went for the period of four months and developed this paper from their narratives and experiences with social media and information. The naive or innocent action of these users becomes the question of a larger democracy and social system. Hence, this micro study will help in formation knowledge on how the big data is subjective and what it quantifies is not closer to objective truth through the narratives of individual datum (users).

II. Digital Awakening (?) in India

The demonetization changed India's collective economic consciousness in various dynamics. Chatterjee (2017) calls it as "financial digital awakening" but what we argue is that it was not just a financial and radical technological shift, but also a cultural change. It will be difficult to term it is cultural shock in India's urban population but the scenario of Indian rural area provides alternative options to ponder upon.

People everywhere throughout the world are steadily going the digital way and combining ways of life with regards to personal and professional lives. Advances, for example, Mobile Internet and cloud, are being embraced at a fast pace to cross over any barrier between the two. With the Indian government driving the path to a digital India projects and schemes, the concentration of this activity would be around enhancing personal satisfaction. With an attention on creating applications that are anything but difficult to use for a bigger arrangement of gatherings of people in the nation, digitization holds the best potential to affect our

economy. It is difficult to unlink digital transformation with economy, politics and cultural references. When this digital boom is opportunity for growth (Ashitha, 2016) but on the other hand questions arises on its control and relation with the mass communication patterns.

The digital literacy and awareness in consuming data and production of content is also a main question when people spend more time of Internet and their choices changes the pace of life. When the online (virtual) change is not corresponds the offline (physical) life problems related to technology and information happens. During this study, we were introduced and interacted with our digital users (samples of study) during financial transaction. The entry of online money platforms like Paytm and Airtel Money provides them to participate in digital work and correspond that with physical life. "I never though this (mobile phone) will bring money to my shop. I found people coming into my shop just because I accept mobile money. But there is an issue of reliability in financial transaction" Manju, 23 old fancy and beauty store shopkeeper who supports her ailing mother is happy that her mobile phone is engages their business other than "chatting and hearing songs" but same time unsure about the reality and future of digital world. The reduced or discounted rates of mobile data, availability of cheaper smartphone, regional language interfaces on phone and applications cater the interest on digital medium. When we talk about a social media project on rural India, it is very important to the nation. The rural economy in India is mostly agriculture based and is very important because of its vital supply and demand links with the other Indian industries. Agriculture acts as the base-industry for several other industries predominantly as a source of raw material. When digital media enabled smartphones and social media becomes all and everything for the rural mass, the opinion and collective consciousness created and its results are a concern to human rights. It goes to a further extent when the pieces of information available in social media impact perceptions of source credibility (Westerman et al., 2013). In the age of vast universe of social media, what people know and how they are informed or mislead becomes an important interrogation of digital human rights – or in other words critics celebrate – the result of post-truth politics. It is true to an extent that social media provides various possibilities and opportunities for people to engage with current information rather than the traditional forms of print and broadcast media. This provides the public with a new way to understand and evaluate a new source. Scaramuzzo suggests that "Social Media is one of the fastest way to keep up with current topics however just because they are current doesn't make them true" (2017). This is the point where this paper focus stays on. This paper discusses various issues related to post-truth political discussion related with India but not an attempt to advocate or criticise. But then again, the aim of this paper is to find a point of saturation on which users depend on social media messages and correlate with real life experiences. The narrative analysis of the users' studies in this paper justifies the academic and mass media agreement on social media post-truth phenomenon- worth more than the facts - It's about how I feel about things (Vis, 2013; Poole, 2016; Coughlan, 2017; Bennett, 2016; Brown, 2016; McKenna, 2016).

The data for these social media comes from everywhere (Chang et al., 2014) – be it pictures and videos, online purchase records, and geolocation information. The understanding of data – the big data – should be as a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon that rests on the interplay of technology, analysis and mythology (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). This shows that any critical questions on big data and its consumption should incorporated with cultural and dailylife of the social systems (users and agents). Since the current study focuses only on eighteen lives and their naratives of social media the validation problem on studying on online users (Rogers, 2013) could also be solved to an extend.

III. Social Media and Post- truth

Oxford dictionaries defines post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influenced in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". So, the question is what is the wrong with post-truth? And who frames the beliefs in the minds of digital users through social media. Post – truth according to Speed & Mannion (2017) focuses mainly on spreading 'fake news' and circulate 'alternative facts'. Sismondo (2017) accuses US politics, like most other electoral politics, of having been a post-truth arena for a long time. While thinking cases in India, during demonetization social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp provided scope of messages to reach mass.

The following note on post-truth provided by Lockie is

"the way we might best counter misinformation/propaganda, however is less obvious. When factual claims are judged accordingly to their emotional and ideological consistency, we cannot expect that lobbing more factual claims into the public domain will necessarily challenge anyone's beliefs. How many headlines and social media posts have we seen screaming that someone-or-other has dropped a 'truth-bomb' or 'destroyed' an argument? (2017).

The arguments of 'truth-bomb' and 'post-truth' are supported by the outcomes of the Brexit and 2016 US presidential election results and Allcott&Gentzkow (2017) further reconfirms it that "people are much more likely to believe stories that favor their preferred candidate, especially if they have ideologically segregated social media networks".

IV. Conclusions from the study

"I think this is the best move from any government around world. I am sure this will bring drastic change in India". Answering on her views on demonetization, Rajiv Kishore – who runs an electrical retail shop who gathered the information of demonetization happened in India through WhatsApp. He has evidences which "claims" to be true and those are photoshopped images and fake

pictorial data which represents various data on black money capture and other figures. In the age of information overload, the (mis)information and fake news can be only seen as harmful violation of human rights. The detail narratives of people we studied also gives an idea that personal histories are created and objective facts finds a backbench in course of social media interaction. The subjective opinions of each users are validated by these social media posts which itself is based on emotional and personal interest of collective mass.

The most interesting part is that each user during study believed they are also part of this governance process through articipating on social media. The participation consists of social communication, social e- commerce, social publication and social entertainment. There four zones of social media as suggested by (Tuten& Solomon, 2017) is well identified during study. While taking the case of Achrol before 10 years, the exposure to media and events were confined to opinion leaders who read newspapers or view television news. It is a matter of that we could identify the "users" and increase in social media usages. But truth and belief generated are dangerous as it provides options for message senders to wrap up their idea to social media echo chambers.

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[i]The 18 users in present study are considered as digitally equipped. This means that they can browse digital platform (smartphones) to access social media and gathers information and uses it to understand world view.