Abstract: Let's think global: Social Media Commission – A Global Governing Body

The issues of hate speech, disinformation, misinformation and polarisation on one side, and arbitrary exercise of power on public discourse and information on the other side, is what I coin as a broken social media problem. The urge to fix social media has been well recognised by various policy actors, including policy experts, the government and the general public, since the Cambridge Analytica fallout. But over-reliance on the government (as in India and the UK) or firm (as in self-regulation or Facebook's oversight board) for implementing consumer-centric governance is inadequate. For instance, in India, according to the IT Rules 2021, the government can order social media platforms to take down any content which they determine to be unlawful. This paves the way for unaccountable censorship. Whereas in the case of the Facebook oversight board, it doesn't account for the pluralistic aspect of the users as a single board can't cover diversity in users and contextual heterogeneity in the issues.

Therefore, looking through the democratic legitimacy lens proposed by Schmidt (modifying Scharpf's taxonomies), India's IT Rules 2021 or any other democratic government regulations pass the input legitimacy (by the people), as the people elect the government. But it lacks output legitimacy (better consumer outcomes) and throughput legitimacy (transparency and accountability). In the case of the Facebook oversight board or any other self-regulation, it lacks input legitimacy, and often lacks output and throughput legitimacy. So then, what could be the democratically legitimate global structure for social media governance?

This paper tries to answer this question by proposing a global governance body called Social Media Commission (SMC). The proposed structure will have international, country-level, district or state-level bodies (accounting for pluralistic users and input legitimacy), which will work in synergy and work in down to top approach.

The paper will also discuss the federation structure of the SMC advised by input, throughput and output legitimacy. Where SMC will have a system, which will be (i) responsive to user concerns through

having active participation and representation of the users (input legitimacy), (ii) governed through robust accountability and process transparency mandates (throughput legitimacy), (iii) effective to deliver better consumer outcomes (output legitimacy).

The study (for this paper) will undertake a detailed meta-analytic literature review to understand the gaps in the existing governance structures to inform the SMC model. The paper will also adopt the criterion sampling method and conduct stakeholder interviews with representatives of social media platforms, social media users, academicians and government bodies to understand the power dynamics and feasibility of operationalising SMC compared to existing governance structures through a double-blind experiment.

While we have a lot of literature analysing the existing governance model, we don't have much literature on alternative global governance models which will pass the democratic legitimacy. Therefore, this paper will be innovative in utilising theoretical framework such as democratic legitimacy to discuss cutting edge governance structure called SMC.

Besides, currently, the policy debates are red-hot with countries regulating the digital public sphere, questioning the international standards of freedom of expression. Therefore, this paper will act as a solution-oriented value edition to this policy debate.

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