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ABSTRACT

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar holds a significant role in enlightening Dalits and shaping an egalitarian vision of the society. Simultaneously, new media technologies have experienced significant growth and have been utilized by Dalits for political mobilization. Consequently, this study critically assesses the comprehensive understanding of these two factors and their contributions to the contemporary socio-political landscape. How are Dalit groups using new media to demand an egalitarian society? What kind of alternative vision and model is emerging through these online practices; do they contain the imagination for an Ambedkarite future? The study deals with these questions.

The thesis is organized into six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction, while the second chapter conducts a thorough review of the existing literature. The third chapter is dedicated to the methodology employed in the study. Chapter four delves into the examination of the emerging Digital Dalit culture within the Indian media landscape. The fifth chapter focuses on the detailed analysis of the samples considered in this research. Finally, the last chapter offers comprehensive conclusions drawn from the study.

To achieve a thorough comprehension of digital culture within the context of Dalits, theoretical framework of this study incorporates the insights of several new media scholars. The study employs Manuel Castells' concepts of 'Communication Power' (2009) as well as Henry Jenkins' concepts of 'Convergence Culture' (2006) and 'Participatory Culture' (2016) to investigate the dynamics of new media culture. Christian Fuchs's critical interventions related to Digital capitalism; Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's (2009) argument of YouTube as a 'cultural public sphere'; Andrew Block Jr.'s exploration of 'Black cyber

culture' (2020), as well as Jeffrey S. Juris's conceptualization of 'Informational utopics' (2008) are instrumental in the study.

A set of two qualitative methods, Discourse analysis and in-depth interview, has been used to conduct this research. Critical discourse analysis of three specific YouTube channels, namely *The News Beak*, *The Mooknayak*, and *Ambedkarnama* and semi-structured interviews of eight Dalit YouTubers have been conducted in the study.

This study aligns with the understanding that despite limitations Dalits have indeed embraced new media as an alternative platform of communication and mobilization. Their new media practices have led to emergence of a 'Digital Dalit culture' and 'Ambedkarite informational utopics' which are the major findings of the study. The selected YouTube Channels exemplify the inheritance and adoption of Ambedkar's media legacy and framework. Ambedkarite vision of the future has emerged from the analysis of these YouTube channels, which is also a major finding of the study. They have fostered the vision of an Ambedkarite future characterized by dignity, equality and social justice. In this way, Dalits are not only expressing their issues and opinions through their new media practices but also creating a unique Digital Dalit culture and recording their own history. Additionally, they are presenting a vision of the future.

However, the expression and engagement of Dalits also encounter obstacles from corporate algorithms, which tend to underemphasize their content. Thus, in the realm of social media platforms, ownership is one of the most significant factors to consider. Therefore, a pivotal question arises regarding who wields control over new media technology. In this respect, Dalits are notably underrepresented, and without their meaningful inclusion, the digital space cannot truly become fully participatory for Dalits.