

## **Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Opinion and Voter Behavior**

**Dr. Ratnesh Patel**

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Dr. Preeti Global University, Dinara, Shivpuri,  
Madhya Pradesh

### **Abstract**

The development of the digital space has radically changed the way political communication is conducted, especially in India, the largest democracy on the planet. In this paper, the author discusses how social media is shaping political opinion and affecting voter behavior with particular reference to Indian electoral politics between the 2014 to 2024. The main aims are to evaluate the degree to which social media sources can affect the formation of the political opinion among Indian voters and to estimate the connection between the online political activity and the real one. The research design adopted was a descriptive-analytical design and the secondary data were collected through the Election Commission of India, DataReportal, Statista and published peer-reviewed research. The hypothesis of the study is that the greater the exposure to social media, the more the political opinion and voting preferences of Indian voters would change. Social networking tools like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram have become the powerful tools of political mobilization as the results of the study show that around 43% of voters recognized the role of social media in their election vote in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. It is pointed out in the discussion that, on the one hand, social media democratises political participation, but also is a contributor to the multiplication of misinformation and echo chambers. The paper concludes that the digital literacy campaigns and regulatory frameworks are the key to maintaining democratic integrity in the era of algorithmically mediated politics.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Political Opinion, Voter Behavior, Indian Elections, Digital Democracy

### **1. Introduction**

The social media and democratic politics nexus has emerged as one of the most important spheres of study in the modern political science. In India, with a population of more than 968 million citizens eligible to vote in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and 642 million citizens actually casting their votes (Election Commission of India, 2024), the impact of digital platforms on election outcomes has gained a new significance. The country has been undergoing an extraordinary growth with regard to the spending of digital campaigns, which in 2014 were approximated to range between 30 to 40 crore Indian rupees, but are currently between 1,000 to 2,000 crore Indian rupees in 2025 (International Journal of Modern Science and Research Technology, 2025), which underscores the significance of centrality of social media strategies in the current electioneering in India. By January 2025, India is projected to have approximately 491 million

social media user identities, and this is 33.7 percent of the entire population (DataReportal, 2025). This huge digital constituency has turned WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook into potent agenda-setting, voter mobilization, and narrative building tools, rather than communication ones. The 2014 general election, commonly referred to as the Twitter election, and the 2019 election, also known as the WhatsApp election, showed gradual intensification of social media in the Indian politics (Neyazi & Schroeder, 2021). The 2024 election that was marked by individualized voter engagement formed by data and the use of artificial intelligence and influencer-driven campaigns was a qualitative breakthrough in the digital political strategy (C D, 2025).

The theoretical basis of this paper is the theory of agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and the theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), the former, being a postulation that the opinions of the majority or the majority of people on the social media about a particular issue may have a strong impact on majority perception on that issue, and the latter, which assumes that the prevalence of majority opinions about the specified issue on the social media can make the voices of the opposition heard. When applied to the Indian case, these frameworks help understand how pre-existing political tastes are reinforced through the application of an algorithmic curation of political content to platforms, which is an important factor in an echo-chamber (Sunstein, 2001). One of the first researchers to investigate the role of social media in the voting process was Biswas, Ingle, and Roy (2014), who determined that online platforms establish the direct connection between politicians and voters bypassing the traditional media as gatekeepers. More recently, Balakumaraguru and Sankar Ganesh (2024) have also thought of social media campaigning as a more recent aspect in the electoral warfare in India and notes how parties are already applying the theory of uses and gratification to optimise voter turnout. The survey data presented by Sardesai (2023) are longitudinal and were obtained by CSDS when elections were conducted in the country, but, in general, revealed that there is a positive relationship between exposure on social media and being a voter supporting a specific political formation, and, specifically, BJP. The current paper fits into this line of research by summarizing the most recent data provided on the 2024 general elections in an integrated analytical framework in understanding the enabling and distortional impact of social media on Indian democratic engagement.

## 2. Literature Review

The academic discussion of the political influence of social media has significantly changed during the last ten years. These proposals by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) constituted a background of how digital misinformation impacts elections by showing that social media was used as a source of election news by 14% of American adults, with the circulation of fake news stories favoring specific candidates being much greater. Although their research targeted the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, their theoretical concepts of echo chambers and selective exposure have been used widely in elections in India. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) theorised social media as a user-generated content platform that fundamentally changes power structure in communicative activities of the masses and find intuitive backing in the Indian

political scene in which parties have formed special digital units to handle the narrative construction and refutation message creation.

Sharma and Sivakumar (2023) interviewed veteran Indian journalists in depth to explore the role of social media in the Indian political discourse in the year 2019 in the Indian general elections. Their results showed that social media played a significant role in agenda setting in the mainstream media, which allowed politicians to avoid the old system and agenda frame-setting of traditional media and contact voters directly. Political communication has fundamentally been reorganized through this disintermediation, with a field experiment by Carney (2022) in Tamil Nadu showing how these styles have been restructured. A randomized study by Carney determined that participants exposed to WhatsApp political groups not only had more knowledge on politics but also changed their preference towards affiliated parties with moderate voters registering the largest attitudinal change. A thorough survey of 1,500 Kerala voters by Balasundaram, Sreedharan, Babu, and Gopinath (2024) demonstrated that Facebook engagement measures, especially shares and followers, were more highly significant than Twitter engagement measures in predicting candidate winnability, indicating that platforms have specific effects on voter mobilization.

Misinformation has been of particular interest to scholars. Badrinathan and Chauchard (2023) investigated how political misinformation is transmitted psychologically via the Indian social media in that they identified that partisan identity is a strong predictor of vulnerability to false political narratives. The Oxford Internet Institute (2024) reported how the digital mobilization machine in the BJP, which has been organized at both booth-level to national-level social media activities, generated overwhelming precedence in voter outreach in the 2024 elections. The authors Di Marco, Cinelli, and Quattrociocchi (2025) performed an analysis of the worldwide election situation on Facebook, including India, and discovered that online users are always characterized by selective exposure to politically friendly material, which creates echo chambers that impact the formation of beliefs to a significant level during the election seasons. Moreover, the research conducted by Bode, Vraga, Borah, and Shah (2014) has determined that political social networking opens new arenas of political behavior which has severe democratic implications, which was confirmed in the Indian environment where more than 65% of the total population under the age of 35 actively engages in political content through digital platforms (IJRSI, 2025).

### **3. Objectives**

1. To assess the extent to which social media platforms influence political opinion formation and electoral decision-making among Indian voters, with specific reference to the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections.
2. To analyze the relationship between patterns of digital political engagement including platform usage, content consumption, and exposure to political messaging and actual voter behavior and turnout in Indian elections.

#### 4. Methodology

The research design used in this study is the descriptive-analytical research design based on the secondary data analysis approach that is suitable in terms of synthesizing massive amounts of electoral and digital engagement data across numerous election cycles. The study is based on publicly published secondary data by institutional sources such as the Election Commission of India (2024) statistical reports of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the DataReportal (2025) report Digital India, the datasets of social media usage in India provided by Statista, and peer-reviewed research publications found in Google Scholar. The sample structure includes election data at the national level and electoral data endangered in 543 parliamentary constituencies with some 968 million eligible voters, digital interaction figures of the 491 million Indian social media customers in January 2025, and the research of field surveys and experiments performed by researchers in various Indian states such as Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. The analytical techniques are comparative statistical analysis of the voter turnout data in the previous election years, cross tabulation of the social media penetration data with the electoral participation data, and content analysis of the available empirical research on the digital political communication in India. The data triangulation technique has been applied in which quantitative data on elections released by Election Commission have been cross-tabulated with the data on the use of social media released by DataReportal and Statista and checked against the findings of peer review academic research. This multi-source validation methodology will assure that the results are well-grounded, testable, and methodologically acceptable without being dependent on one source of data. The time range of the research is the years 2014-2024, it is possible to conduct longitudinal research regarding changing digital political features during three general election campaigns.

#### 5. Results

The following tables present verified empirical data demonstrating the relationship between social media penetration, political engagement, and voter behavior in India.

**Table 1: Growth of Social Media Users in India (2020–2025)**

Year	Social Media Users (in millions)	% of Total Population	Year-on-Year Growth (%)
2020	320	23.5	—
2021	370	26.8	15.6
2022	412	29.5	11.4
2023	448	31.8	8.7

2024	462	32.4	3.1
2025	491	33.7	6.3

Source: DataReportal, Digital India Reports (2020–2025)

Table 1 brings to light the steady increasing trend in the number of social media consumers in India whose number grew by 53.4% across five years, 320 million in 2020 to 491 million in 2025. This increased at 6.3 percent annually in 2025 following an almost stifled growth in 2023/2024, mainly due to the rural internet development and smartphone affordability. It is evident that this growing digital constituency has steadily increased the number of electors that political parties can reach using social media campaigns, which has fundamentally changed the magnitude and scope of the electoral mobilization strategies that political parties use over consecutive election periods.

**Table 2: Platform-wise Social Media Penetration among Indian Internet Users (Q3, 2024)**

Platform	Penetration Rate (% of Internet Users)	Estimated Users (in millions)
WhatsApp	80.8	531
Instagram	77.9	517
Facebook	64.0	493
YouTube	74.7	491
X (Twitter)	42.9	297
LinkedIn	35.7	234

Source: DataReportal, 2025; The Global Statistics, 2025

As indicated in table 2, WhatsApp is the most used application with 80.8 percent penetration among the Indian internet users, with Instagram at number 2 at 77.9 percent penetration and YouTube at 74.7 percent penetration. Notably, WhatsApp has been linked to be the most utilized platform when it comes to direct political communication, especially in the rural and semi-urban regions, and over 400 million users have been targeted by receiving campaign messages over the 2024 elections. This platform hierarchy presents a major political strategy implication by the fact that parties create different content forms and varying message strategies between platforms to enable them to optimize voter response and control the message.

**Table 3: Digital Campaign Spending in Indian General Elections (2014–2024)**

Election Year	Estimated Digital Ad Spend (₹ Crore)	Approximate % of Total Campaign Budget
2014 General Elections	30–40	5–8
2019 General Elections	500–600	15–20
2024 General Elections	1,000+	30–40

Source: *International Journal of Modern Science and Research Technology, 2025; Election Commission of India Reports*

Table 3 shows a growth in the spending on digital campaigns in three consecutive general elections exponentially. The online advertisement spending is estimated to be ₹30-40 crore in 2014 to more than 1,000 crore in 2024, which is almost 25 times more than in ten years. In line with this, the share of the entire campaign funds allocated to online platforms increased by about 5 to 8 percent to 30 to 40 percent indicating a structural change in the way political parties are now focused on social media to reach out to voters, do targeted outreach, and mobilize voters in the Indian democratic framework.

**Table 4: Voter Turnout in Indian General Elections (2009–2024)**

Election Year	Total Eligible Voters (in millions)	Total Votes Cast (in millions)	Voter Turnout (%)
2009	717	417	58.19
2014	834	554	66.44
2019	912	614	67.40
2024	968	642	65.79

Source: *Election Commission of India, Statistical Reports (2009–2024)*

Table 4 shows the voting pattern of four consecutive general elections with an increase in the number of voters with the highest number 642 million voters voting in the 2024 election, the highest number of voters to vote in Indian electoral history. Although there was a slight drop in the percentage turnout of 67.40 in 2019 to 65.79 in 2024, the 2024 elections showed the highest women turnout of 312 million. The phase that matches with the growing exponentially the social media (2014 onwards) indicates that the turnout rates are consistently high (more than 65 percent) indicating that digital political activities have helped to sustain an electoral turnout even with the rising number of electorate.

**Table 5: Influence of Social Media on Voter Decision-Making (Karnataka Study, 2024)**

Parameter	Response	Percentage (%)
Social media influenced voting decision	Yes	43
Social media influenced voting decision	No	57
Encountered political campaigns on social media	Yes	71
Encountered political campaigns on social media	No	29
Exercised voting right	Yes	82
Exercised voting right	No	18

Source: *Field Research, Karnataka, 2024 (The Academic, 2025)*

A field study carried during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka showed that 43 percent of the respondents admitted that social media had a direct impact on their voting behavior, and 71 percent of the respondents indicated that they had been exposed to the campaigns of political parties via the social media (Table 5). Importantly, 82 percent of the respondents turned out to vote, and the large overlap in the exposure to the social media campaign and the voter participation indicated a positive relationship between the digital political involvement and the actual electoral vote involvement, even though causality needs to be studied.

**Table 6: Gender and Age Distribution of Social Media Users in India (January 2025)**

Demographic Category	Percentage of Total Social Media Users (%)
Male Users	65.5
Female Users	34.5
Users aged 18–34 (Gen Z & Millennials)	~60
Users aged 35–54	~28
Users aged 55+	~12

*Source: DataReportal, Digital India 2025*

Table 6 shows that there is a big gender difference and age difference in the social media demographics in India with male users comprising 65.5 percent and female users comprising 34.5 percent of the total number of users. The fact that there is a larger number of users in the 18-34 age bracket, and it represents about 60 percent of all social media users, implies that the youthful voters are being over exposed to online political matters. The implications of this demographic skew are significant to the formation of political opinions because the de facto imbalance between younger and male-dominated online audiences, otherwise, may present the online political discourse with representational asymmetries, which risk distorting the sense of the opinion of the overall electorate.

## 6. Discussion

The first and the second goals are supported by the empirical data provided in this paper, which indicates that social media has become a structurally important factor in informing political opinion and voter behavior in modern India. Corresponding to the first goal the level of the impact of the social media on political opinion forming, the data show obvious increase of digital political activity with every occurring election. The fact that the number of social media users in India has grown to 491 million in 2025 (Table 1) compared to 320 million in 2020, as well as the fact that, in 2014, the amount of money spent by the political parties on digital campaigns was 30-40 crore, which has increased to more than 1,000 crore in 2024 (Table 3), suggests that the political parties have identified and invested in social media as one of their main tools of forming opinion. This result is consistent with the agenda-setting theory proposed by

McCombs and Shaw (1972): platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube have effectively become an agenda-setting agent, and platforms like these influence the formation of political preferences among voters, especially among ideologically moderate ones. The data offered by the Karnataka field study (Table 5), states that 43% of voters admitted to the influence of social media on their voting behavior, which is justified by the experimental result presented by Carney (2022), according to which WhatsApp political groups can change the voting behavior of voters. Also, Sharma and Sivakumar (2023) indicated that social media has transformed the journalist-politician-voter dynamic since it allows political actors to circumvent the traditional media gatekeeping. This unbundling has increased the agenda-setting ability of party owned digital content, 71 percent of respondents in a survey conducted in Karnataka said they had been exposed to political campaign on digital platforms. This observation is also confirmed by a longitudinal study of CSDS data by Sardesai (2023) who found that the exposure to social media and the subsequent support of the BJP has been positively correlated over several elections, which may indicate that a sustained engagement with the digital world can cause permanent political preferences and not just temporary election reactions.

In terms of the second objective, which is the correlation between digital political turnout and real voter turnout, the statistics show a complex image. Although the historic high of 642 million voters turned out in 2024 (Table 4), the small drop in the percentage turnout (67.40 by 65.79) points to the concept of a saturation point of the mobilization effect of social media on the already-linked population groups. The platform penetration (Table 2) indicates that WhatsApp has the highest penetration rate at 80.8% which has made it the main platform of political mobilization in both urban and rural constituencies, which was also in line with the results of the study by Balasundaram et al. (2024) which showed that platform-specific engagement dynamics are the main predictor of electoral results. The difference in the use of social media between the genders and the age (Table 6) makes one question the representational equity in the field of digital political discourse. As men in the social media form 65.5% of the social media participants and Gen Z forms the majority of the online political conversations, misinformation aspect is of critical concern, which could lead to what Noelle-Neumann (1974) hypothesized as a digital spiral of silence. As Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) determined, fake news become viral more often in social media, and in the Indian case, about 80 percent of young voters reported exposure to fake news on the platforms, with WhatsApp (29.8 percent), Instagram (17.8 percent), and Facebook (15.8 percent) being the dominant channels of distributing fake news (Social and Media Matters, 2024). According to Oxford Internet Institute (2024), deepfake technology was used in the 2024 elections, and this is a qualitative step forward in the level of digital political manipulation. This was confirmed by Di Marco et al. (2025) as these dynamics are not specific to India, but are outcomes of global trends of selective exposure and the creation of echo chambers on social media platforms at times when elections take place, an outcome of these digital information environments that emphasize predictive findings by Sunstein (2001): the bifurcation of ideological groups via digital information markets.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper confirms that social media has now been a structural part, and a more determinative aspect of Indian electoral politics, which has played a critical role in politically opinion-making as well as voter behavior. The examples indicate that the 491 million social media users in India, coupled with the more than 1,000 crore spent by digital campaigns in the 2024 elections, have established a digital public sphere in which the narratives of politics are built, argued, and even fed upon at a level never seen before. Even though social media has made political participation more democratic through the direct interaction between voters and politicians and increasing their knowledge about politics, it also poses significant threats due to the spread of misinformation, the echo-chamber effect, and gender-based digital inequalities. The results support the immediate necessity of a strong regulatory system that covers political advertising transparency online, widespread digital literacy interventions aimed at first-time voters, and accountability system on the platform to reduce the pernicious influence of misinformation on the democratic process. The future study must utilize longitudinal panel design to identify the causal processes between the exposure to social media and voting behavior and comparison across states of India would shed light on the difference in the digital politics across regions.

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