The Influence of Social Media on Elections: Expenditure, Campaign Strategies, Outcomes, and Bias

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Abstract: Social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of political campaigns and elections worldwide. Since 2012, the role of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has expanded from forms of communication to key strategic battlegrounds that influence election outcomes. This paper explores the relationship between social media and elections by analyzing elections from across the world. This paper analyses trends in campaign expenditure, innovative digital strategies, and the role of data-driven targeting in shaping voter behavior. Additionally, it examines instances of potential interference by social media companies, investigating claims of political prejudice and favoritism, and algorithmic bias. Drawing on news articles and academic research, this study identifies patterns across elections in diverse regions, from the United States to emerging democracies. The findings highlight the urgent need for transparency, regulation, and ethical standards to balance the power of social media in electoral processes.

Keyword: Social media, election, campaign,

INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of political campaigns and elections worldwide. Since 2012, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have evolved from simple communication channels to strategic battlegrounds that significantly influence voter behavior and election outcomes. As traditional campaign methods face digital disruption, social media has emerged as a double-edged sword—empowering candidates with tools for personalized engagement while simultaneously raising concerns about misinformation, bias, and algorithmic interference (Enli, 2017).

The global rise in campaign expenditure on social media underscores its growing importance. Political actors allocate significant portions of their budgets to digital advertising, with the 2020 U.S. presidential candidates spending over $1 billion on online platforms (Fowler et al., 2021). This surge in expenditure illustrates the strategic shift toward targeted voter outreach made possible by data analytics and algorithm-driven content delivery (Kreiss et al., 2018). However, the allocation of resources remains uneven, as wealthier campaigns leverage sophisticated analytics tools for more effective engagement (Enli, 2017). Innovative campaign strategies have also become a hallmark of the digital age. Politicians deploy techniques such as microtargeted advertisements, viral content creation, and real-time engagement to mobilize support (Baldwin-Philippi, 2019). While such strategies enhance voter interaction, critics caution against the potential for manipulation and the dissemination of disinformation (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

The influence of social media extends beyond campaign tactics to affect voter behavior and electoral outcomes. Studies reveal both positive and negative consequences—from increased voter turnout due to peer influence (Bond et al., 2012) to the reinforcement of ideological echo chambers (Sunstein, 2017). Moreover, populist leaders, including Donald Trump in the U.S. and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, have leveraged social media to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and connect directly with voters (Reis et al., 2020).

Beyond voter influence, concerns about bias and algorithmic manipulation have garnered widespread attention. Algorithms designed to maximize engagement often amplify polarizing content, marginalizing moderate perspectives (Pariser, 2011). The opacity of these algorithms and claims of political favoritism by social media companies further erode public trust in democratic processes (Ghosh et al., 2021). These dynamics highlight the need for regulatory frameworks and ethical standards to ensure fairness and transparency in digital electoral campaigns.

The Indian context offers additional insights into social media's transformative role. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become essential tools for political communication, reshaping campaign strategies and expenditure patterns (Rajesh, 2018). Indian political parties utilize data-driven approaches for voter segmentation and personalized messaging, often leveraging influencers to amplify their reach (Sharma, 2019; Kumar, 2020). However, the challenges of misinformation and echo chambers persist, as

unverified content spreads rapidly across platforms, potentially distorting public opinion (Sethi, 2021). The Indian government's attempts to regulate digital platforms, such as the Information Technology Rules of 2021, underscore the complexity of balancing freedom of expression with electoral integrity (Chaudhury, 2021).

By analyzing trends in campaign expenditure, digital strategies, voter behavior, and social media bias, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of social media's evolving role in elections. Drawing on academic research and news reports, it underscores the urgent need for transparent and ethical practices in digital political communication to safeguard democratic principles worldwide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Perspective

The advent of social media has redefined political campaigns, creating new avenues for communication and engagement. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have enabled politicians to connect directly with voters, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. However, this transformation raises critical questions about the implications for democratic processes. This literature review explores the multifaceted impact of social media on elections globally, focusing on four primary dimensions: expenditure, campaign strategies, electoral outcomes, and bias.

1. **Expenditure on Social Media Campaigns**: Research highlights the growing allocation of campaign budgets to social media advertising. According to Kreiss et al. (2018), digital platforms offer cost-effective methods to target specific demographics, enabling microtargeting based on user data. In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, for instance, candidates spent over $1 billion on digital advertising (Fowler et al., 2021). Studies also reveal disparities in access to resources, with wealthier campaigns leveraging advanced analytics and paid advertisements more effectively (Enli, 2017).

2. **Campaign Strategies**: social media has facilitated innovative campaign strategies, including personalized messaging, viral content creation, and interactive engagement with voters. Tufekci (2014) argues that platforms enable "networked micro-celebrity" strategies, where candidates cultivate direct relationships with supporters. Moreover, research by Baldwin-Philippi (2019) demonstrates how campaigns use data-driven approaches to optimize messaging. However, critics highlight the potential for manipulation, including the dissemination of disinformation and coordinated inauthentic behavior (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

3. **Electoral Outcomes**: The influence of social media on voter behavior and election results is well-documented but remains contested. Some studies suggest that exposure to political ads and partisan content can reinforce existing beliefs, contributing to echo chambers (Sunstein, 2017). Others, such as Bond et al. (2012), provide evidence that social media can increase voter turnout through peer influence. Notably, the role of platforms in facilitating populist movements and outsider candidates has been widely analyzed, with examples including Donald Trump in the U.S. and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (Kreis, 2017; Reis et al., 2020).

4. **Bias and Algorithmic Influence**: Algorithmic bias on social media platforms raises concerns about fairness and representation in electoral discourse. Algorithms prioritize content that maximizes engagement, often amplifying polarizing or sensationalist material (Pariser, 2011). Research by Ghosh et al. (2021) indicates that such dynamics can marginalize moderate voices and exacerbate political polarization. Additionally, the lack of transparency in algorithmic decision-making hinders accountability and fosters mistrust among voters.

Indian Perspective

Social media has become an essential tool for political campaigns worldwide, including India. With the rise of digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, the political landscape in India has undergone a transformation, enabling politicians to reach voters directly, bypassing traditional media. This literature review explores the impact of social media on Indian elections, focusing on four key aspects: electoral expenditure, campaign strategies, electoral outcomes, and media bias.

1. **Electoral Expenditure and social media:** One of the prominent effects of social media on Indian elections is the reduction in the costs of campaigning. Traditional methods, such as print advertisements, television spots, and public rallies, require significant financial resources. However, social media offers a cost-effective alternative. According to Rajesh (2018), candidates can now reach millions of voters with a minimal budget through targeted digital ads, posts, and viral content. Additionally, research by Das and Roy (2020) found that social media campaigns often rely on organic reach (e.g., posts shared by followers), which significantly lowers expenditure compared to conventional methods. This democratization of political advertising has been hailed for levelling the playing field, especially for smaller parties or independent candidates. However, some scholars argue that while digital advertising may seem cost-effective, the actual expenditure can be high due to the need for professional digital strategists, content creators, and media buying for targeted advertisements (Jain, 2021). The shift to digital campaigning also raises concerns

about transparency, as the regulation of online political advertisements remains a challenge in India (Chatterjee, 2022).

2. **Campaign Strategies in the Digital Age:** social media has redefined campaign strategies, enabling political parties and candidates to engage in more personalized and targeted communication with voters. As noted by Sharma (2019), data analytics plays a central role in modern campaigns. Political parties use voter data to segment the electorate and tailor content to specific demographic groups. This strategic approach allows for greater voter mobilization, especially in India's diverse and fragmented electorate. The use of influencers and celebrities has also been a significant development. According to Kumar (2020), political campaigns increasingly involve endorsements from social media influencers, celebrities, and even common citizens who have substantial online followings. This tactic, which mirrors celebrity endorsements in traditional media, is a powerful way to build trust and credibility among voters, particularly the youth. Moreover, social media has altered the timing and nature of political communication. As per Patel (2021), candidates now operate on a 24/7 cycle, with updates, speeches, and direct communications shared in real-time, keeping the electorate engaged. The use of WhatsApp groups to disseminate information and organize local campaigning is particularly prevalent in India, where mobile phone penetration is high.

3. **Electoral Outcomes and social media:** The influence of social media on electoral outcomes has been the subject of extensive research. A study by Singh and Verma (2020) demonstrated a correlation between active social media use and electoral success, particularly among younger and urban voters. The authors suggest that social media acts as a platform for political discourse, helping to shape public opinion and galvanize support. However, they caution that social media alone is not a guarantee of electoral victory, as other factors, such as ground-level campaigning and voter sentiment, still play crucial roles. A contrasting viewpoint is presented by Bansal (2022), who argues that while social media has an impact, traditional forms of political engagement, such as face-to-face interactions, still outweigh the role of digital platforms in many rural areas. This points to a division in the effectiveness of social media campaigns based on geography and voter demographics. The role of social media in influencing electoral outcomes is also evident in the rapid spread of fake news and misinformation. As Sethi (2021) highlights, the spread of unverified information on social media platforms has the potential to distort public perception and manipulate voters, particularly in closely contested elections. In

India, where political polarization is often pronounced, misinformation can exacerbate divisions and swing voter sentiment.

4. **Bias and Misinformation on social media:** The prevalence of bias and misinformation on social media is a growing concern in the context of Indian elections. Several scholars (e.g., Gupta, 2021; Shukla, 2020) have examined how social media platforms, through algorithmic filtering, create echo chambers that reinforce existing political beliefs and biases. This phenomenon can result in the dissemination of polarized content, leading to a fragmented public sphere. Additionally, the role of social media giants such as Facebook and Twitter in curbing the spread of fake news has been questioned. According to Mohan (2022), the lack of effective regulation has allowed certain political parties to exploit these platforms for spreading fake news, promoting their ideologies, and attacking rivals. This has led to concerns about the integrity of the electoral process and the role of social media in amplifying divisive content. In response, the Indian government has taken steps to regulate social media platforms, such as implementing the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which require platforms to remove harmful content. However, critics argue that these regulations could be used to stifle dissent and control political discourse (Chaudhury, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method followed was sample based response gathering on the questionnaire developed for the purpose of research paper.

Sample was randomly selected, and the questionnaire was sent through mail and WhatsApp in the Google form for quick response.
153 respondents participated.
The data was analyzed using bi-variate analysis on SPSS.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. **Gender Distribution** The sample consists of 148 respondents, with a significant gender imbalance. Male participants account for 70.27% (104 respondents), while female participants make up only 29.73% (44 respondents). This skewed distribution indicates a potential limitation in capturing perspectives from diverse gender groups, as the sample may not adequately represent the female demographic.

2. **Age Distribution** The respondents are predominantly young adults, with 50% (74 respondents) in the 20 to 25 years age bracket. The second-largest group comprises individuals above

50 years, accounting for 29.73% (44 respondents). Other age groups are sparsely represented, with only 9.46% (14 respondents) in the 26 to 30 years category and less than 5% in each of the remaining categories, including 31 to 50 years. This heavy concentration in the youngest and oldest age brackets presents a limitation for understanding perspectives across a broader age spectrum.

3. **Income Group Distribution** Income levels show a wide range, though the largest proportion of respondents (41.89%) falls within the ₹5 to ₹10 lakh per annum category (62 respondents). The second-largest group earns less than ₹5 lakh per annum (27.03%, 40 respondents), followed by those earning ₹11 to ₹20 lakh per annum (16.22%, 24 respondents). Only 14.86% (22 respondents) report incomes exceeding ₹20 lakh per annum. The income distribution skews towards the middle-income groups, potentially limiting insights from high-income earners.

4. **Occupation Distribution** Students form the largest occupational category, accounting for 47.30% (70 respondents). This is followed by individuals in service roles (37.84%, 56 respondents). Retirees constitute 12.16% (18 respondents), while homemakers make up the smallest group at 2.70% (4 respondents). The dominance of students and service professionals may narrow the diversity of occupational insights.

5. **Level of Education Distribution** The educational background of respondents shows a strong skew toward higher education. Postgraduates form the majority, representing 58.11% (86 respondents). Graduates follow at 33.78% (50 respondents). Only 6.76% (10 respondents) hold a doctorate, and a mere 1.35% (2 respondents) have completed only 12th grade. This sample's focus on highly educated individuals may not fully capture the views of those with lower educational qualifications.

Limitations of the Sample
1. **Gender Imbalance:** The underrepresentation of female respondents (29.73%) limits gender-diverse perspectives.
2. **Age Distribution Skew:** The sample disproportionately represents younger (20 to 25 years) and older (above 50 years) age groups, leading to potential biases in insights related to different life stages.
3. **Income Distribution:** Limited representation from high-income groups (₹20 lakh per annum and above) may skew findings towards middle-income perspectives.
4. **Occupational Bias:** The predominance of students and service professionals restricts the occupational diversity of the sample.

Strategic Takeaways for Political Campaigns:
1. **Multi-Platform Approach:** Prioritize digital content for youth but maintain traditional formats for the middle-aged and older groups.
2. **Tailored Messaging:** Craft different narratives for distinct age groups to maximize engagement.

5. **Educational Background:** The sample heavily favors postgraduates, limiting insights from those with lower educational qualifications.

These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and making generalizations based on this data. Future studies could benefit from a more balanced and diverse sample to enhance the validity and representativeness of insights.

BIVARIATE ANALYSIS
Social Media Usage by Age Group
- **Dominant Youth Engagement (20 to 25 years):**
  - With **21.62% engaging daily** and nearly **44.6% actively using it at least weekly**, this age group clearly shows high digital receptivity. This aligns with global trends, where Gen Z and younger millennials consume news, opinions, and political content heavily on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.
- **Significant Presence of Older Adults (More than 50 years):**
  - Despite assumptions about the digital gap, the data reveals **17.57% daily usage among this group**, showing a noticeable digital adoption trend among older adults.This demographic likely includes retired professionals who have time and motivation to stay politically informed through social media.
- **The Digital Disengagement Zone (26 to 45 years)**26 to 45 years -This group shows significantly **lower engagement**, with less than 10% actively using social media during election campaigns.

Voter Apathy and Non-Engagement
- Approximately **9.46% of respondents never refer to social media** during election campaigns.
- Notably, **older individuals (46 to 50 years)** are among the least digitally active, with **1.35% completely disengaged** and many accessing it rarely or never.

Social Media as a Political Battlefield
- The fact that nearly half (47.3%) of all age groups still refer to social media daily demonstrates its role as a critical battleground for political influence. Campaigners must therefore carefully design content strategies that combat misinformation and build trust.

3. **Building Trust:** Tackle misinformation concerns by verifying information sources and providing transparent communication.
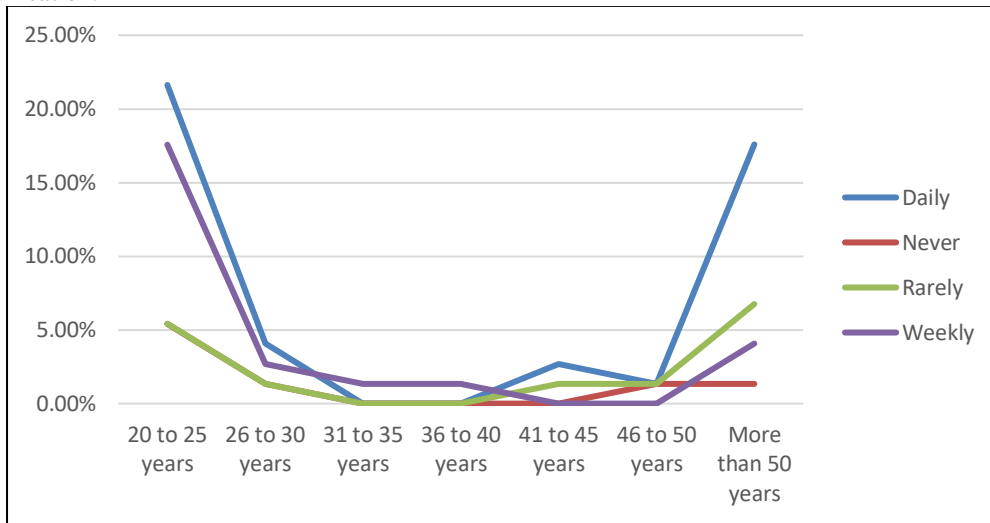
Reference to social media for update

Insights on Political Engagement by Gender
*Higher Political Engagement Among Males:*
- **43.24% of males** follow politics compared to only **22.97% of females**, indicating a significant gender gap in political engagement.
- This trend suggests that men may either be more interested in political discourse or exposed to it more frequently through media and social circles.
- A lower percentage of females (**6.76%**) report no engagement with politics, compared to **27.03% of males**.
- Factors contributing to this trend may include cultural norms, perceived complexity of political content, or a lack of female-oriented political narratives.

Campaign Implications:
- For Women political campaigns could benefit by incorporating more inclusive strategies aimed at women.
- For Men-given the already high engagement, strategies could focus on deepening the discourse through debates, interactive events, and issue-based conversations.

Overall Political Awareness:
With **66.22% of respondents following politics**, there is a clear majority of politically engaged individuals across genders.
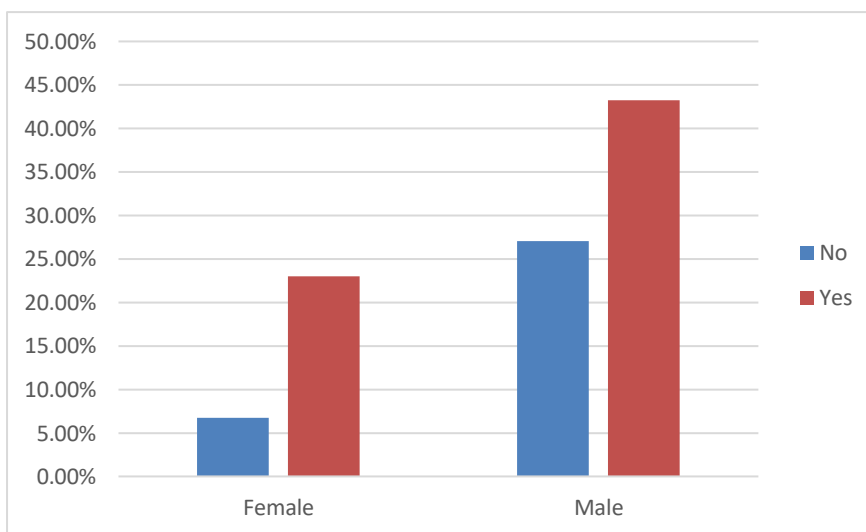
*Detailed Insights on Media Reliance for Political Updates Across Income Brackets*
- **Diverse Preferences in the 5 to 10 Lakh Income Bracket-** This group represents the **largest demographic (41.89%)** and exhibits varied media consumption habits. **Moderate reliance (rating 3, 14.86%)** suggests they value a balance between the immediacy of social media and the credibility of traditional media. The higher

proportion of **10.81% leaning toward traditional media (rating 4)** implies they trust established news sources during elections, perhaps seeking fact-checked and comprehensive updates.

- **Low-Income Group's Access Challenges-** The **Less than 5 Lakh bracket (27.03%)** shows noticeable fragmentation in media preference. A moderate reliance on mixed media (12.16%) is visible, but the **4.05% strong preference for traditional media (rating 5)** highlights challenges in accessing or trusting social media platforms.
- **High-Income Group Preferring Selective Traditional Content-** Among those earning **more than 20 Lakh per annum**, the highest engagement is with traditional media (6.76% for rating 4). Their reliance on traditional sources likely stems from an interest in curated, fact-driven content or specialized reports rather than fragmented social updates.
- **Implication:** Political campaigns should target 5-10 lakh income group with multi-platform strategies, integrating quick social media updates and detailed reports on traditional channels. For the lower income group, data constraints or platform familiarity might limit social media engagement. Traditional media still holds sway, suggesting the need for outreach via radio, TV, or public announcements. For the high-income group thought leadership content, exclusive debates, or premium media outlets should be utilized to capture attention.

Emerging Reliance on Social Media Across Income Levels:
1. Despite differences, all income groups show some inclination toward social media reliance, with **14.86% fully depending on it (rating 1)** for political updates.
2. This suggests a cross-demographic shift toward quick and accessible content, regardless of socio-economic status.
3. Higher-income groups appear more selective, trusting curated traditional content.
4. Middle-income individuals seek a blend of immediacy and reliability, while lower-income groups face access or trust issues on digital platforms.
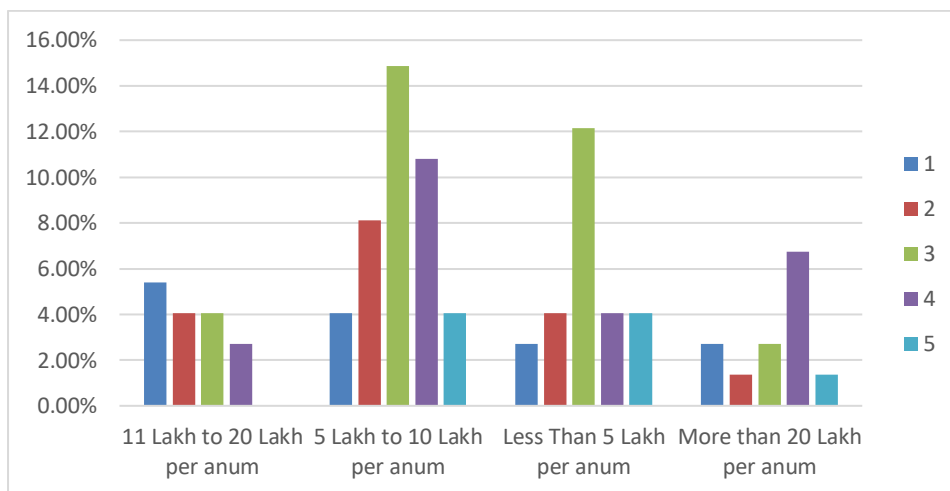

Insights on Voting Frequency by Occupation
- **Home Makers: Strong Voting Commitment-**100% of homemakers have voted more than five times, demonstrating consistent civic engagement.
- **Retired Individuals: Veteran Voters-**88.89% have voted more than five times, with 11.11% voting more than two times.
- **Service Professionals: Mixed Engagement-** A majority (60.71%) of service professionals have voted more than five times, while 32.14% voted more than two times.
- **Students: Emerging Voters-** 42.86% are first-time voters, while another 42.86% have voted more than twice, and only 2.86% have voted more than five times. Notably, 11.43% of students reported that they do not vote.

General Observations:
- The overall non-voting population is low (6.76%), indicating that most respondents recognize the importance of voting.
- Higher participation from homemakers and retirees highlights the role of life stage in influencing voter engagement.
- Political campaigns may benefit from targeting younger voters, particularly students, to cultivate early voting habits.
- Students are either newly eligible voters or still forming their political preferences. The relatively high non-voting percentage may indicate disinterest or lack of awareness about the importance of voting.
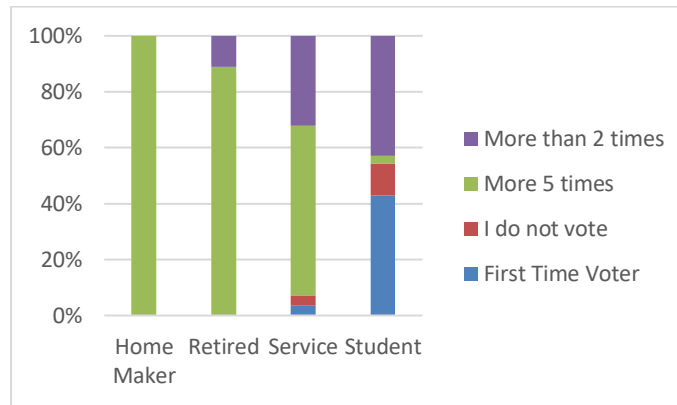
Insights on Perceived Political Bias in Social Media by Educational Qualification
- o **Graduates and Postgraduates: Strong Perception of Bias-** 68% of graduates and 72.09% of postgraduates believe that social media platforms exhibit political bias. Postgraduates have a lower proportion of respondents who are unsure (13.95%) compared to graduates.
- o **Postgraduates: Most Decisive Group- Doctorates: Complete Agreement on Bias-** 100% of doctoral degree holders believe that social media platforms show political bias.
- o **12th Pass Respondents: Limited Awareness or Exposure-**100% of respondents in this category are unsure about the bias.

General Observation
- o Overall, 71.62% of respondents believe social media is politically biased, signalling a widespread sentiment across educational groups.
- o Only 10.81% outright reject the idea of bias.
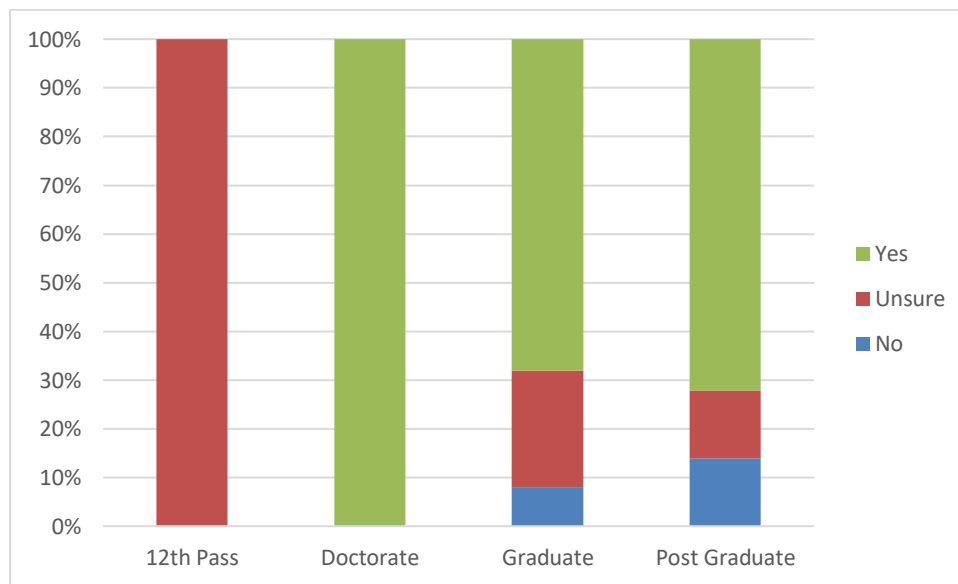

Insights on Voting Behavior
High Voter Engagement Among Those Who Follow Politics -Among respondents who follow politics, 80% (40 out of 46) have voted more than twice, with 24 having voted over five times.

Non-Political Respondents Less Likely to Vote- Out of those who do not follow politics, only 24.5% (28 out of 102) are first-time voters, while 31.4% (32 out of 102) have voted more than five times.

Non-voters Tend to Be Less Politically Involved-80% (8 out of 10) of non-voters are individuals who do not follow politics, while only 2 non-voters follow politics.

First-Time Voters and Political Awareness-Only 12.5% of first-time voters (4 out of 32) follow politics.
Multiple Voting Trends-57.8% (56 out of 148) of respondents have voted more than five times, indicating a strong inclination toward habitual voting across both political awareness categories.
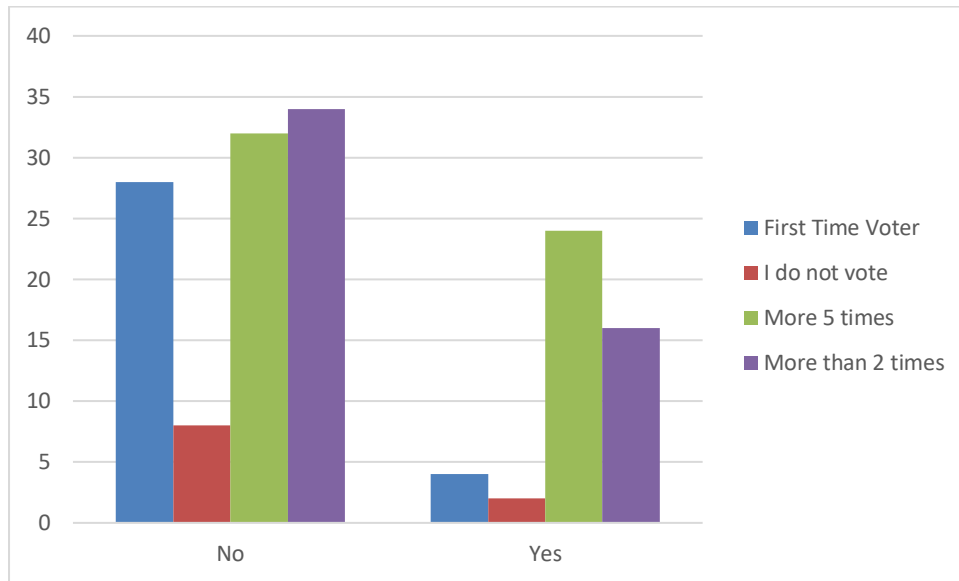
Insights on Encountering Misinformation on Social Media During Elections
- o **High Prevalence of Misinformation Exposure-** 63.51% of respondents reported encountering misinformation or fake news during elections on social media.
- o **Strong Correlation Between Awareness and Perception of Fake News-** Among those who believe they have encountered misinformation, 51.35% reported "Yes" compared to only 4.05% who claim they did not encounter misinformation despite following social media during elections.
- o **Uncertainty About Misinformation:** 17.57% of respondents are unsure whether they have encountered misinformation.
- o **Denial of Misinformation-** Only 10.81% outright claimed not to have encountered misinformation.
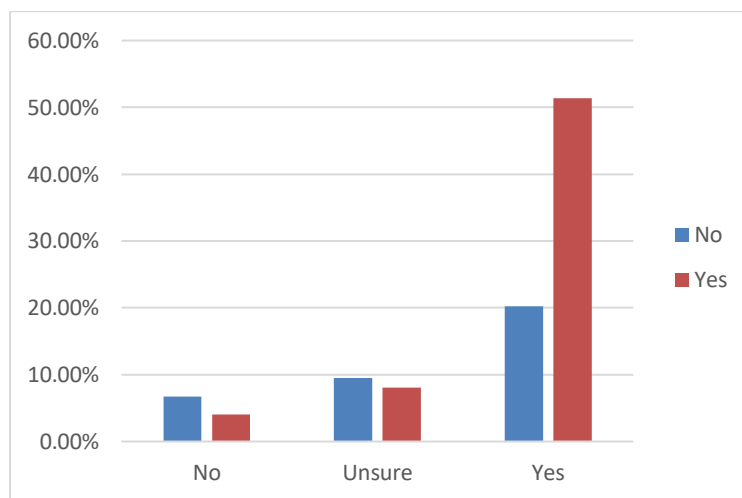

Reliance on Traditional Media vs. Social Media
- o **Traditional Media Prevalence (87.84%)**-A significant majority (87.84%) of respondents claim that they either have a "Very Low" to "Moderate" reliance on social media. This suggests that **traditional media outlets** (television, radio, print newspapers) are still the dominant channels for political news for most people.
- o **Range of Reliance Levels**-The reliance on traditional media is spread across a wide spectrum:
    - ▪ **31.08%** report **moderate reliance**, highlighting that a large portion of the population is somewhat engaged with traditional media.
    - ▪ **16.22%** have **low reliance**, meaning they might use both sources (traditional and social media) but still prioritize traditional outlets.
    - ▪ A smaller proportion, **13.51%**, report **very low reliance** on social media, which shows that a few people still rely almost exclusively on traditional sources for updates.
- o **Social Media's Limited Role (12.16%)**-Only **12.16%** of respondents say they rely on social media for political updates, a relatively small fraction compared to traditional media.Among this group:

- ▪ The **highest reliance** is seen in the "Reliance" category (5.41%), indicating that while social media is gaining ground, most people still don't prioritize it over traditional outlets.
        - ▪ **Low reliance** (1.35%) and **very low reliance** (1.35%) also appear, suggesting that even within the smaller group of social media users, there is no overwhelming shift toward it as the primary source for political information.
- **Implications for Political Communication**:
    - o This data highlights the ongoing dominance of traditional media for political updates, suggesting that campaigns, political analysts, and governments still have a **greater reach through traditional media**.
    - o **Social media's influence**, though still growing, appears to be more of a supplementary or secondary source for political information. The smaller group with higher reliance on social media may reflect younger or more digitally engaged demographics, but even within that group, reliance isn't overwhelming.

Opportunities for Social Media:

- Despite the dominance of traditional media, **social media platforms** hold potential for targeted engagement. Political campaigns and media outlets could focus on these 12.16% of respondents who rely on social media more heavily, particularly through digital strategies that cater to **younger, tech-savvy voters** or **specific geographic regions**.
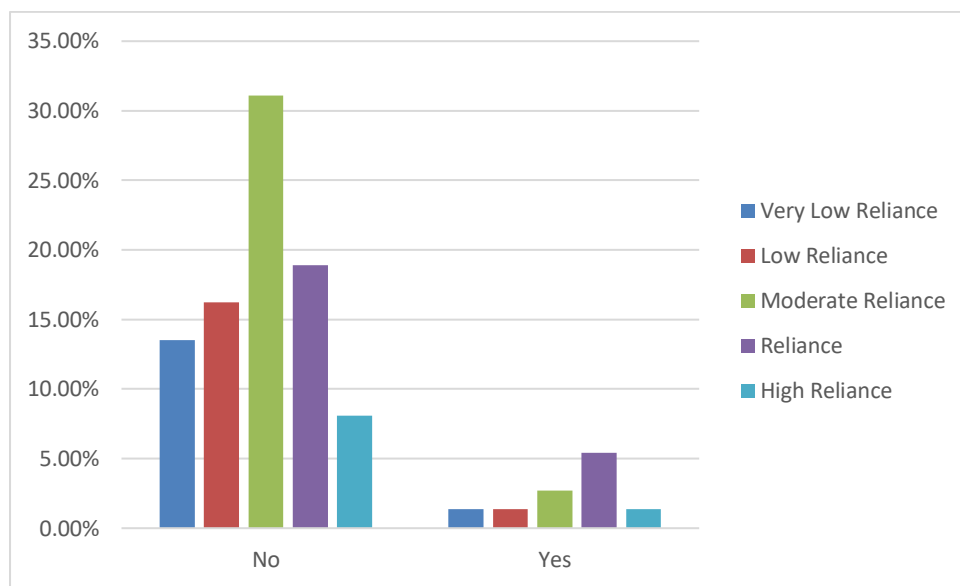
Analysis of Political Bias on Social Media Platforms
Overall Opinion on Political Bias:

- **71.62%** of respondents believe that social media platforms **show political bias**. This majority is a strong indicator that most people perceive political bias on these platforms, whether intentional or not.
- A significant **28.38%** of people think social media platforms are **less democratic** (5.41%) or **more democratic** (21.62%), which could reflect concerns about platform algorithms favoring certain ideologies or political views.

Neutral/No Change Perspective:

- **25.68%** of respondents feel that there has been **no change** in political bias, indicating a sense of either neutrality or uncertainty about the impact of social media on politics.
- Among those who feel there's no change, **9.46%** are unsure, and **1.35%** believe social media has maintained political neutrality, reflecting the complexity and varying perceptions around these platforms.

"Unsure" Responses:

- **17.57%** of respondents remain unsure about whether social media platforms exhibit political bias, indicating some level of **uncertainty** or **lack of trust** in the platforms' fairness.
- The "Unsure" category is higher for those who feel that social media has had "no change" in its democratic nature, suggesting that individuals who are uncertain may not fully engage with the nuances of content moderation, algorithms, or political dynamics on these platforms.

Insights and Implications:

- **Strong Perception of Bias**: The data reveals that a **majority** of individuals (71.62%) believe social media platforms show political bias, whether they perceive them as leaning "more democratic" or "less democratic."

- **Public Concern about Algorithmic Influence**: The larger group (35.14%) perceives social media as **more democratic**, but the **second-largest group (21.62%)** believes platforms are **less democratic**, hinting at widespread concerns about how social media platforms manipulate content and influence public opinion.
- **Uncertainty and Distrust**: The substantial percentage of **"Unsure" (17.57%)** responses suggests that people are not fully informed or convinced about the role social media plays in political discourse, which could stem from a lack of transparency in how content is moderated or presented.
- **Platform Accountability**: Given these perceptions, there is an opportunity for **social media companies** to engage in more transparent practices, offer more insight into their algorithms, and actively address accusations of bias to foster trust among users.
- **Potential for Political Polarization**: The perception of bias—whether leaning more or less democratic—could contribute to political **polarization**, as users may feel that platforms are not neutral and may avoid engaging with content that doesn't align with their beliefs, deepening divides in public opinion.
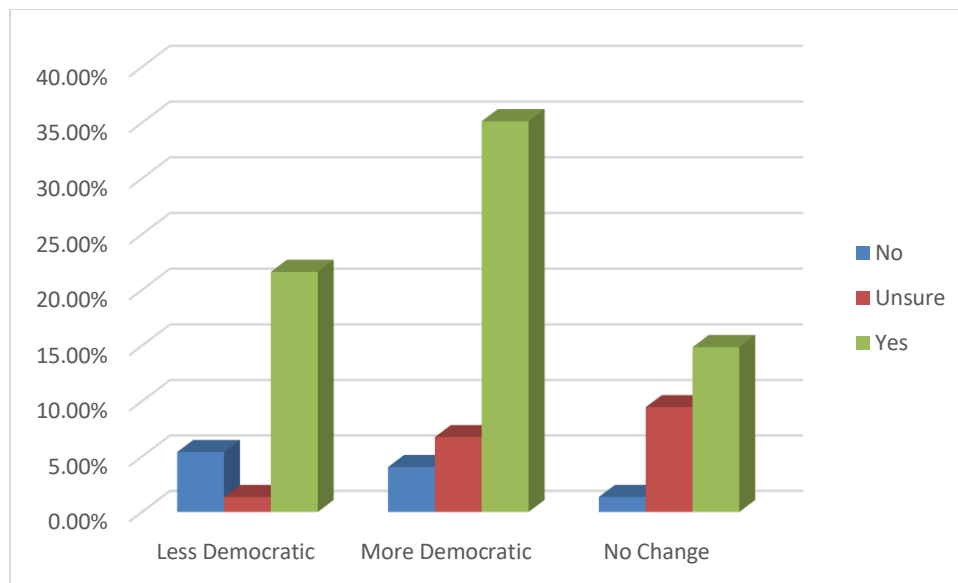
Analysis of Reliance on Social Media vs. Traditional Media for Political Updates

1. **Overall Reliance Breakdown**:
   a. **39.27%** of respondents are **"Not Sure"** about their reliance on social media compared to traditional media, indicating a significant level of **uncertainty** or **lack of clarity** regarding which media they rely on for political updates.
   b. **37.90%** of respondents **rely** on social media to some extent, showing that a substantial proportion is using social media platforms for political news, either moderately or highly.
   c. **22.83%** of respondents rely on **traditional media**, either moderately, or to a greater extent, signalling that traditional media is still somewhat significant, but not the predominant source for most individuals.
2. **Key Insights:**
3. **Social Media's Growing Role**:
   a. Despite the **"Not Sure"** category being substantial, **37.90%** of respondents do rely on social media for political updates to some degree, with **16.44%** using it regularly. This indicates that social media is becoming an essential tool for political information, particularly for those in the **Moderate** to **High Reliance** categories.
4. C. **Traditional Media Still Holds Value**:
5. While social media is growing, **traditional media** still has a place, with **22.83%** of respondents depending on it, albeit less so than social media. The **"Moderate Reliance"** and **"Reliance"** categories show that traditional media is still an important tool for a significant portion of the population, but its dominance is weakening.
6. D. **Uncertainty About Media Consumption**:
7. A significant portion of people (39.27%) are unsure about their reliance on either source, which suggests that many individuals are exposed to both media types but do not have a clear distinction in terms of which they prioritize for political updates. This might reflect a blending of media sources, where people often turn to multiple outlets for information.
8. **Potential for Digital Engagement**:
9. Given that nearly **40%** of people are unsure about their media reliance, **platforms** that combine both social media and traditional media (e.g., news aggregators or hybrid channels) could capitalize on this ambiguity by offering cross-platform experiences or highlighting content from both sources.
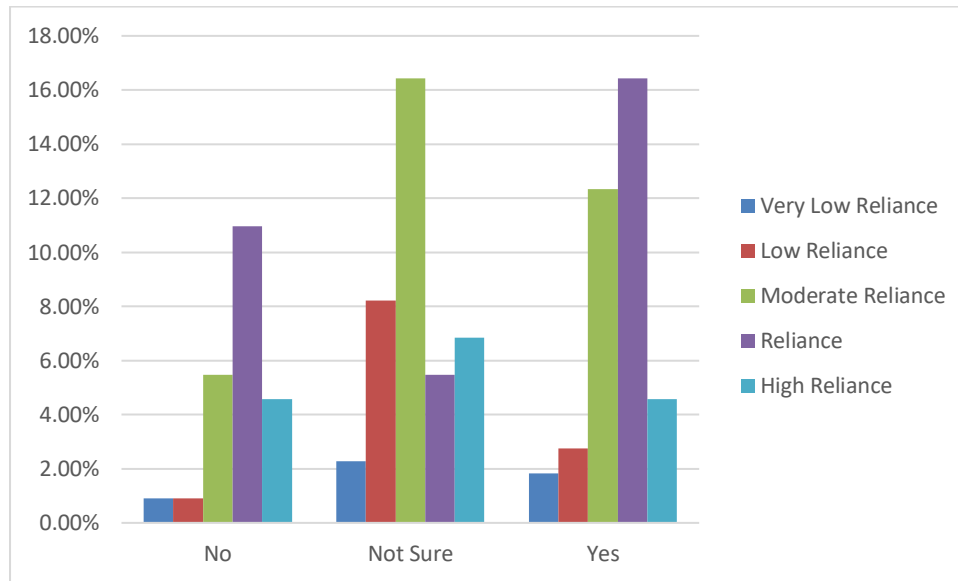
Qualitative data Analysis

- **Insights from Survey Responses on Social Media Campaign Strategies**
- **Perception of Social Media's Effectiveness**:
    - ○ **"I believe social media platforms are effective but biased. So voter should rely more on print media for detailed analysis."**
        - ▪ This response highlights a **skepticism towards social media** as a reliable source for in-depth political information. It suggests that while social media may be seen as a tool for reach, there is concern over its bias, leading respondents to lean towards **traditional media** (print) for thorough political analysis.
- **Effective Campaign Strategies**:
    - ○ **"Live streaming events = Viral Hashtags > Targeted Ads > Influencer endorsements"**
        - ▪ This ranking provides clear priorities on what respondents believe to be the most effective in driving engagement and visibility on social media. **Live streaming events** are considered highly effective, possibly due to their interactive nature, followed by the widespread reach of **viral hashtags**, **targeted ads**, and **influencer endorsements**. This order of preference suggests that content that directly engages the audience (live events and viral content) is more impactful than passive methods like ads or endorsements.

    - ○ **"Organic posts and stories"** also point towards the effectiveness of **authentic and non-paid content**, which tends to resonate more with the audience and is likely perceived as more genuine.
- **Traditional Media Preference**:
    - ○ **"News channels and newspapers"**, **"Newspapers and Television News Channels"**, and **"Print Media, Blogs, Word of mouth publicity, Sting operations"** suggest a continued preference for **traditional media** and **offline engagement**. These responses emphasize that traditional media still holds value for many, especially in terms of trustworthiness and detailed coverage. **Word of mouth** and **blogs** are also mentioned, which indicate that personalized, peer-driven channels are still seen as effective for political communication.
- **Reluctance and Indifference**:
    - ○ Responses like **"No idea"**, **"Not interested in politics at all"**, and **"Ok"** suggest **apathy or disinterest** in political campaigns or the use of social media for political purposes. These individuals likely feel disengaged from political discourse and may represent a **silent demographic** that is hard to reach, possibly indicating a gap in how campaigns are designed and targeted.
- **Practicality of Direct Engagement**:
    - ○ **"One to one connection bonding and work is more important when it comes to reaching out to people but at the same time how practical it is that is also important."**
        - ▪ This response reflects the **importance of personal connection** in political campaigns but questions the

practicality of scaling such engagement. It acknowledges that while personal, direct communication (one-to-one) might be the most effective in building trust, **scalability** and **practical implementation** are significant barriers. This suggests a challenge for campaigns trying to balance personalized outreach with broader reach.

- **Offline Strategies**:
  - **"Party hoardings"**, **"Rallies"**, and **"Door to door"** represent **offline engagement** methods that still resonate with some people. These strategies suggest that for certain demographics or regions, **physical presence and visibility** (through hoardings, rallies, and door-to-door interactions) might be more influential than digital campaigns.

- **Insights on Innovative and Unconventional Political Campaign Methods on Social Media**
- **Use of Live Streaming and Crowd Fundraising**:
  - **"Arvind Kejriwal used live streaming platform for crowd fundraising"**
    - This highlights how **live streaming** is being utilized not just for engagement but as a tool for **fundraising**, making the campaign process more transparent and interactive. This method allows **real-time connection** with voters while also tapping into a new pool of **micro-donors** who feel more involved in the process.

- **Leveraging Social Media for Direct Communication**:
  - **"Instagram live to hear public grievances"**
    - The use of **Instagram live** to **hear public grievances** signifies an effort to **engage** directly with voters in a conversational way. This platform offers a more **personalized** experience, allowing politicians to address concerns in real-time. It fosters a sense of **openness and accessibility**, building trust among the public.

- **Meme Culture and Humor**:
  - **"Using meme culture and leveraging humor"**
    - Political candidates are increasingly tapping into **meme culture** and **humor** as a way to connect with younger, digitally-savvy voters. Memes are shareable, engaging, and easy to consume, allowing candidates to **appeal to a broader audience** in an informal and relatable manner. Humor can also serve to **humanize** the candidate, making them more approachable.

- **Obama's "Yes We Can" Campaign**:
  - **"Yes we can by Obama"**
    - The **"Yes We Can"** slogan from Obama's campaign, now considered an iconic example of **digital campaigning**, was revolutionary at the time for leveraging **social media** to create a movement. This example reflects how **slogans** can become viral and gain **cultural significance** through social media, encouraging people to not only vote but become **part of a cause**.

- **Chai Pe Charcha (Tea with Modi)**:
  - **"Chai pe Charcha"**
    - This was a unique method used by **Narendra Modi**, where he invited citizens for informal conversations over tea. By shifting the typical political discourse to more **casual, relatable** settings, it encouraged **grassroots participation**. This format humanized the leader and allowed for more **honest discussions** with the electorate.
  - **Digitizing Campaigns:"They are now digitizing their campaign efforts"**
    - The trend of **digitizing campaigns** is evident across political candidates as they adapt to an increasingly digital world. This includes using various digital platforms for **outreach, engagement,** and **fundraising**, in addition to traditional methods. The digital shift allows candidates to **target specific demographics** and track voter engagement more precisely.
    - **BJP's Digital Innovations:"BJP"-**The **BJP** has been a leader in leveraging **technology** and **digital outreach**, from using social media platforms for direct communication to **targeted ads** and **data-driven campaigns**. This modern approach has

allowed them to **maintain strong engagement** with a large and diverse voter base.

- **Fake News and Its Impact:"Fake news etc."**There is an increasing awareness of how **fake news** can spread via social media platforms. While some may use it to create controversy or sway public opinion, **fake news** can damage a candidate's credibility and mislead voters. This emphasizes the need for **fact-checking** and **transparency** in political discourse, especially online.

- **Data and Statistical Briefs**: **"Statistical and analytical briefs and planned developmental activities"** Candidates are utilizing **data-driven communication**, presenting **statistical briefs** and **development plans** to appeal to an informed electorate. This highlights a more **intellectual approach** to campaigning, offering evidence-based arguments to gain support.

- **Insights from Responses on Changing Political Opinions Based on Social Media Activity**
  - **Transparency and Direct Engagement**: **"Candidates using social media to be transparent about their policies can help change/improve perceptions as they can tackle any nuances or incorrect inferences of past statements directly."**
    - **Personalized Interaction and Authenticity**: **"If they engage their audience via comments or replies, they seem genuine and personable."**Social media allows candidates to engage directly with voters, making them appear **approachable** and **authentic**. Personalized responses and interaction, such as replying to comments or messages, help **humanize** politicians, making them seem more relatable and trustworthy. This can lead to a **positive shift** in voter opinion as the candidate is perceived as **genuine** and **responsive**.
    - **Influence of Social Media on Decision-Making:"Assessment is done by individuals based on social media activity"** This suggests that **social media presence** has become a key factor in how individuals **evaluate candidates**. Voters are now **assessing candidates** not only based on their **policy positions** but also on how they **present themselves** online, how **engaged** they are with their audience, and how they manage their online persona.

- **Work-Driven Voting Decisions:"I only vote due to work done by candidate or party"-**Despite the influence of social media, some voters still base their decisions primarily on the **performance** and **work done** by the candidate or party. This response implies that while social media can sway perceptions, **substantive achievements** and **real-world actions** hold more weight in the voting decision for certain individuals.

- **Social Media as a Double-Edged Sword**: **"Social media has become a campaign platform as the news becomes viral in no time influencing judgements based on impact and content which we do not know is factual or not."**The **speed** and **reach** of social media make it a powerful tool for **spreading information** and **shaping opinions**. However, this comes with the **risk of misinformation**, as viral content may not always be **factual**. This response highlights a **cautionary view** of social media's role in influencing voter perceptions, as it can be challenging to distinguish between **fact and fiction** in the flood of information that circulates online.

- **More People-Oriented Accounts:"More people oriented account"**This suggests that candidates who adopt a **people-centric approach** on social media, focusing on **community engagement** and **addressing public concerns**, are likely to be viewed more favorably. **People-oriented accounts**

reflect a candidate's **commitment** to serving the electorate and can be crucial for building rapport and trust.

- **Indifference or Passive Engagement:"Ok"**Some individuals may be less affected by social media campaigns, suggesting that while social media is a powerful tool for **many voters**, it may have a **lesser impact** on others who are more focused on **tangible achievements** or **issues** rather than online interactions.

- **Insights on Misinformation and Fake News in Elections on Social Media**
  - **Bias in Content and Political Advantage:"All the times person/ party in power have advantage"**
    - **"All we hear appears to be biased towards one or the other. It's hard to ascertain what is true and what is not."**Social media platforms often reflect **biases** in the content shared, with those in power having a **clear advantage** in shaping narratives. This bias makes it **difficult** for users to determine the **truth** of the information they encounter, further complicating voters' ability to make informed decisions.
    - **Content that Degrades or Defames Opponents:"BJP is classic example...they still degrade congress instead of taking their game up""Fake content created and circulated for defaming."**Political parties and affiliates use **defamation tactics** on social media to attack opponents, focusing on **negative content** aimed at discrediting them rather than promoting their own agendas. This highlights how social media is used not only to sway opinions but to **undermine opponents**.
    - **Fake News on Sensitive Issues:"Caste, Religion based news**Social media is a **breeding ground** for misinformation that exploits sensitive topics such as **caste**, **religion**, and **democracy**. **False rumors** or **biased news** targeting these

issues aim to stir **social unrest** or influence voter behavior based on **divisive narratives**.

- **Manipulation through Edited Media:"Like edited videos to mislead people", Misinterpretation of quotes/statements"-**Videos, quotes, and statements are often **manipulated** and **misinterpreted** to **mislead** voters. This can result in **altered perceptions** or distorted information about political candidates or policies, shaping opinions through **false representation**.

- **Misinformation from Influencers and Public Figures:"Dhruv Rathee, one of the leading YouTube influencers shared highly biased information during the last Central elections""Kejriwal misinform people about welfare schemes"**Even **popular influencers** and **public figures** are accused of spreading **biased** or **misleading information**, often to push a particular narrative. This highlights the responsibility social media influencers have in ensuring the accuracy of the information they share, as their reach can significantly shape public opinion.

- **Widespread Nature of Fake News:"Fake news is all over the place""Numerous fake videos and news float on various social media platforms"Fake news** is pervasive across platforms, making it difficult for users to differentiate between credible and non-credible sources. This **over-saturation** of misinformation leads to **confusion** and **distrust** among voters.

  - **Exploitation of Technology for Misinformation:"Deepfake videos of political opponents""Pegasus"**

- Technological tools like **deepfake videos** and **spyware** are being used to manipulate **visual content** and **spread false narratives**, further deepening concerns about the **integrity** of political campaigns and the **security** of information.

- **Unverified and Biased Information**:"Some WhatsApp forwards are biased and baseless."Unverified and **biased content** circulating through WhatsApp and other platforms can quickly sway public opinion, especially when exit polls or news articles are **fabricated** to favor a specific party. The lack of **credible sources** or **fact-checking** results in the spread of **baseless information**.

- **Global Phenomenon of Misinformation**:"This is very common across the globe and done by both sides of the political spectrum.""Mostly it is done by affiliates and not party members directly, but in India the latter also happens."Misinformation and **disinformation** are not isolated to a particular region or political party. It is a **global issue** that transcends borders and occurs across **both sides of the political spectrum**. This suggests the widespread nature of the problem and the need for **global solutions** to combat it.

- **Perception Management through Manipulation**:"Works which they have showed done is still yet to complete.""Wrong details are published to enhance party image. On demand no substantial details are ever shared by any party."Politicians often publish **exaggerated or incomplete claims** about their achievements to **enhance their image**, with little or no **accountability** or **verification** of the information they provide.

- **Insights on Accountability of Social Media Platforms for Political Content and Advertisements**
  - **Government Influence and Responsibility**:"As they are paid for govt. advertisement from public money, they follow govt instructions.""The power of social media platforms, if unchecked, poses a danger to democratic institutions."Social media platforms often have a **government connection** in

terms of paid ads, which can raise concerns about their **independence** and **accountability** in presenting unbiased political content. The platforms' role in spreading information funded by the government or political parties necessitates a **greater responsibility** to ensure that the content shared is accurate, non-partisan, and trustworthy to safeguard the integrity of **democratic institutions**.

  - **Need for Governance and Fact-Checking**:"Fact check or Social Audit should be done about campaigns.""Platforms should fact-check narratives, fake news, deepfake etc."There is a **strong call** for **fact-checking** and **social auditing** to be done on political content. This would help address issues of misinformation, **deepfakes**, and misleading narratives that can distort political campaigns and influence elections. Social media platforms must play a more active role in ensuring the accuracy of political information that is being shared.

  - **Censorship vs. Discretion in Moderation**:"I read the previous question as censorship and am not in favour of that since some statements are fairly subjective and can't be directly labelled as false information or lies.""The ruling party, irrespective of which one it is, is likely to put pressure on them."While **censorship** is viewed as a sensitive issue, many respondents emphasize the **need for discretion** when moderating content. There is a concern that any **fact-checking** authority could be subject to **political influence**, making it hard to achieve **independence** in moderating political discourse. A balanced approach, such as the **'Community Notes'** model used by X (formerly Twitter), where users contribute to fact-checking collaboratively, might provide a more **transparent** and **democratic** solution.

  - **Platform Accountability for Misinformation**:"They should verify the truth/facts while allowing their platforms to be used for campaigning.""They need to spread correct news, as it's their responsibility like a hotel or restaurant servicing food to its customers.""Platforms influence decisions, therefore it has to be accountable."The need for **platform accountability** is stressed, especially as these platforms wield significant influence over public opinion, elections,

and societal discourse. Social media companies should be held responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the **content** they host, just as other industries are held accountable for the services they provide to the public. This responsibility extends to addressing **fake news**, **misleading political ads**, and ensuring **truthfulness** in the information they spread.

o **Transparency and Unbiased Presentation**:"**They must present the unbiased facts about each party.**"

o **"Present facts not biases.""To prevent spreading of misinformation and not promoting religious biased."**Respondents call for platforms to adopt a **transparent approach** to political content. Platforms should prioritize presenting **unbiased** and **accurate information** about all political parties and candidates, preventing the spread of **religious or partisan bias** that could influence voter perceptions. Ensuring **balance** and **fairness** in the presentation of political content is crucial to maintaining the integrity of democratic processes.

o **The Role of AI and Technology**:"**With AI and deepfake, there need to be additional measures to control the spread of misinformation.""They should fact-check...wrong Exit polls, favouring only 1 party."**With the rise of **AI-driven technologies** like **deepfakes**, social media platforms must implement additional safeguards to control the spread of manipulated content. This includes the need for **AI-based detection systems**, as well as human oversight, to ensure that **misleading** or **biased content** does not compromise the **accuracy** of political campaigns.

o **Global Standards and Coordinated Efforts**:"**Governance of information is required.**"

o **"Coordinated regional and global efforts are crucial to ensure consistent and effective standards for social media governance."**Respondents advocate for **global standards** in **social media governance**, particularly when it comes to **political content**. These standards could help ensure that platforms are held accountable for the information they distribute and create a **consistent framework** for moderating content across different regions and countries.

o **Transparency in Funding and Ad Targeting**: "**Political parties announce to give free electricity, ration or money...they should provide the fact**

from where they get the money to distribute."

o **"Platforms should be more accountable for political content and ads because they significantly influence public opinion and elections.** "There is a need for greater **transparency** in political **advertising** and funding on social media. Political parties should be required to disclose **where the money for their promises** comes from, and platforms should be transparent about how political ads are **targeted** to users. Ensuring transparency in **ad spending** and the sources of political **campaign funding** would help mitigate the potential for manipulation or undue influence in elections.

Key Takeaways & Trends
1. **Accountability for Misinformation**: Social media platforms are widely seen as needing to be more **accountable** for political content, particularly with respect to **misinformation**, **fake news**, and **manipulation**. This includes fact-checking, ensuring transparency in **ad spending**, and using AI and technology to curb the spread of **false content**.
2. **Ethical Responsibility**: Many respondents compare platforms' responsibility for political content to that of other service providers like **restaurants** or **hotels**, which are accountable for the quality and truth of their services. Platforms, therefore, have a **moral duty** to ensure that they are not enabling the spread of **biased** or **false** political content.
3. **Balancing Free Speech and Fact-Checking**: While there is support for **fact-checking**, there is also concern about **censorship** and the potential for **political influence** on fact-checking bodies. A **community-driven** approach like **X's Community Notes** is suggested to maintain **transparency** and **independence** in moderating content.
4. **Impact of AI and Deepfakes**: The rise of **AI-generated content** and **deepfakes** presents new challenges in moderating political content, emphasizing the need for **advanced detection** technologies and stricter **platform governance**.
5. **Global Governance of Information**: There is strong support for **regional and global governance** frameworks that can provide **consistent** and **fair regulations** for political content across social media platforms.
6. **Defamation and Negative Campaigning**: social media is heavily used for **defamation**, with political parties frequently attacking their **opponents** rather than promoting their own agendas. This creates a toxic **environment** that undermines the democratic process.
7. **Manipulation of Content**: There is a significant use of **edited content**, including **deepfake videos**, to manipulate public opinion and mislead voters. This technology-driven **manipulation**

poses serious challenges for verifying the truthfulness of political content.

8. **Influencer Impact**: Public figures and **social media influencers** play a substantial role in spreading **biased information**, and their **platforms** can either reinforce or challenge political narratives. The ethical responsibility of influencers in **fact-checking** their content is critical.

9. **Widespread and Global Issue**: The spread of **misinformation** is not confined to one party or region, and it is a **global issue** that affects political discourse everywhere. This indicates the need for **global efforts** in curbing the misuse of social media for political manipulation.

10. **Meme Culture and Humour**: The use of humour and memes shows that **political campaigns** are increasingly adopting a **youth-centric**, informal tone to appeal to a wider, digitally engaged audience.

11. **Digitization and Data**: The ongoing trend of **digitizing campaigns** and using **data analytics** allows for better targeting, engagement, and strategic planning. This is evident in parties like the BJP, which has fully embraced digital platforms for outreach**.**

12. **Grassroots and Relatable Campaigns**: **Informal methods** like **"Chai Pe Charcha"** are used to connect with citizens in a **more relatable** manner, breaking down barriers between the public and politicians.

13. **The Dark Side of Digital**: The mention of **fake news** is a reminder of the potential dangers of **misinformation** in political campaigns. Candidates must be cautious of how they handle and verify the information circulating on digital platforms.

14. **Direct interactions** with voters, such as engaging through comments and replies, play a significant role in making candidates seem **genuine** and **approachable**, fostering a sense of **trust** and connection.

15. While social media presence can influence opinions, there are still voters who prioritize **real-world actions and performance** over digital campaigning, especially when it comes to making voting decisions.

16. **People-Cantered Campaigning**: Voters appreciate when candidates create **people-oriented content** that reflects their **concerns** and **needs**. A candidate who appears **in touch with the electorate** is more likely to foster positive sentiment.

17. **Varied Impact**: While social media is influential for many, some voters remain **indifferent** or rely more on traditional measures of performance, such as the **work done** by a candidate or party.

CONCLUSION

Social media's influence on global elections is profound, shaping expenditure patterns, campaign strategies, electoral outcomes, and bias. As digital platforms continue to evolve, stakeholders must navigate the complexities of harnessing their potential while mitigating risks to democratic principles. Policymakers, researchers, and technology companies have a shared responsibility to ensure that social media serves as a force for transparency, inclusivity, and fairness in electoral processes. The influence of social media on Indian elections is multifaceted, with significant implications for electoral expenditure, campaign strategies, outcomes, and media bias. While social media offers a cost-effective platform for political engagement and has the potential to mobilize voters, its role in spreading misinformation and creating echo chambers poses challenges to the integrity of the electoral process. As digital platforms continue to play a central role in Indian politics, further research is needed to understand the long-term impact of social media on democracy and electoral fairness.

Social media platforms are widely perceived as showing political bias, with respondents viewing them as either more or less democratic. This suggests a pressing need for **greater transparency** and **accountability** in platform policies and algorithms to address concerns around fairness and political influence. The presence of uncertainty in responses also highlights an opportunity for education around how social media platforms operate in the political space.

Social media is increasingly becoming a major source for political updates, with nearly 38% of respondents relying on it. However, **traditional media** still holds a significant role, and many respondents remain **unsure** about which media they prefer for political news. The data points to a **blending of both media types**, and platforms can leverage this by offering integrated solutions that cater to this uncertainty. Transparency in how media content is consumed could also address the confusion for those who are unsure about their media reliance.

Social media can be a powerful tool for **shaping perceptions** and **engaging directly** with voters. Candidates who use it effectively to **communicate transparently**, **engage authentically**, and **address public concerns** are more likely to change or improve voter opinions. However, the risk of **misinformation** and **the need for real-world achievements** still persist, highlighting that while social media is important, it should be used as part of a **holistic campaign strategy** that balances online and offline tactics.

There is a strong belief that social media platforms show political bias, with the majority of respondents either perceive it as a significant issue or a more subtle one. The level of uncertainty in the responses underscores a need for more transparency and clearer communication from platforms to address these concerns and build trust. Addressing this perception of bias could help platforms maintain their legitimacy and foster a more balanced political discourse online.

Traditional media remains the bedrock for most people's political updates, reflecting a broader demographic's preference for established, trustworthy news sources. **Social media** is still on the rise but plays a supplementary role, with a specific, smaller segment of the population actively relying on it. This suggests that political strategies should maintain a **balanced approach**, prioritizing traditional media but **augmenting with social media** to target specific, digitally engaged audiences.

Political candidates are evolving their strategies by integrating **unconventional, innovative methods** that leverage the digital landscape. These approaches enhance **engagement** and help **humanize candidates**, but they also come with the challenges of **misinformation** and **maintaining credibility**. Balancing traditional campaigning methods with these innovative digital strategies could be the key to success in modern political landscapes.

There is a strong consensus that social media platforms must be held **more accountable** for political content and advertisements due to their immense influence on public opinion and democratic processes. A comprehensive approach that combines **fact-checking**, **transparency**, **ethical guidelines**, and **global standards** is essential to curb misinformation and maintain the integrity of political discourse.

Misinformation on social media is a **major concern** in elections, with its reach and impact affecting political opinions and voter behaviour. This highlights the need for more **effective regulation**, **fact-checking mechanisms**, and **accountability** from both political entities and social media platforms. Voters need to become more discerning of the content they encounter and should be encouraged to rely on **verified** and **credible sources**.

Actionable Insights/Recommendations:
1. **Blend of Traditional and Digital Media**: The survey responses indicate that while there is acknowledgment of social media's effectiveness, there's a clear preference for **traditional media** (newspapers, TV, and print) for detailed and unbiased political information. Campaigns should balance **online and offline** strategies to ensure broader reach while maintaining trust and credibility.
2. **Engagement over Advertisement**: Campaigns should prioritize **interactive formats** like **live streaming** and **viral hashtags** over **targeted ads** and **influencer endorsements**, which are less effective in driving authentic engagement. **Organic content** should also be emphasized to maintain credibility.
3. **Focus on Personal Outreach**: Personal and direct communication remains vital, but the practicalities of scaling this approach should be considered. It's crucial to explore how **one-to-one connections** can be enhanced digitally (e.g., through personalized messaging, virtual town halls, or smaller-scale virtual interactions) while maintaining the authenticity that respondents value.
4. **Catering to the Disengaged**: A significant portion of the respondents appears indifferent or uninterested in politics. To reach this demographic, campaigns might need to employ **newer formats** that pique their interest, focusing on **engagement over persuasion**—providing information in a way that's entertaining

or socially relevant to increase political awareness.
5. **Offline Tactics in Combination with Digital**: Despite the digital shift, **offline strategies** like **party hoardings** and **rallies** still play a role in political campaigns. Combining these traditional methods with digital approaches can be an effective way to build a comprehensive campaign strategy.

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