

IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON THE STRENGTHENING OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS SOCIETY

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Abstract

In light of targeted political advertising and assumed government oversight to cut short misinformation, the study investigates what social media effects would be found on voters' behavior during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. A descriptive research design was used, and data were collected by survey from 250 respondents in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh- stakeholders, NGOs, and the general population. In fact, the above data reveals that social media influences voters' attitudes significantly, especially with young adults in the age bracket of 18 to 35. It turns out targeted political advertisements were highly effective in infusing political preference and increasing electoral participation.

Hypothesis testing shows that social media has effects in great measure on the turnout for voting. However, with few controls, misinformation seriously propagates. Recent elections have witnessed significantly improved efficacy in digital campaigns and thus have turned towards stricter legal frameworks. The report contains certain recommendations on provisions for ensuring ethical political advertising, such as transparency mechanisms, enforced fact checks, and voter awareness campaigns.

Keywords

Social media, political advertising, voter behavior, misinformation, electoral participation

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Introduction

Background of the Study

On 14 January 2024 and on subsequent dates, social media would be an unprecedented actor directly affecting voters' perceptions and politics on public issues in the Indian Lok Sabha elections. It made up the arsenal for targeting advertising; political campaigns and engaging voters on widespread networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Such a phenomenon has stirred up questions about misinformation, issues of ethics in advertising, and inadequacies in regulation. Younger people, by far the most digitally active, were growing up increasingly susceptible to social media myths. This is what will be studied by this research as to how, specifically in the 2024 elections, Facebook and Twitter influence voter perceptions, participation, and decision-making while examining the impact analytically and factoring in the need for regulatory responses.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how politicians' use of social media affected their campaigns for the Lok Sabha in 2024.
2. To determine how social media ads affect voters' opinions and choices.
3. To assess the efficacy of social media-based targeted political advertising on various demographic groupings.
4. To investigate the ethical considerations and legal framework of political advertising on social media in India.

Hypothesis

H1: Social media had a big impact on voter opinions during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

H2: Targeted political commercials on social media had a stronger impact on younger voters than on older age groups.

H3: Social media-based political advertising improved voter engagement and participation in the 2024 elections.

H4: Inadequate regulation governing political advertising on social media contributed to the spread of misinformation during the election campaign.

Literature Review

Roy (1996), postulates that a midterm election at that time was more effective than the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, which had no serious campaigning competition therein. After one of the INC's most crushing defeats in the Lok Sabha elections in 1996, the leader of the BJP, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, formed a government that lasted for twelve days before it was dismissed in a better way. Successively under

H.D. Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral, other governments were formed. According to **Roy (1996)**, the Election Commission had unequivocally limited an expenditure to Rs 4.15 lakh in what were called the first ‘Mohalla Elections’, directing the parties to prefer door-to-door canvassing to any form of high-tech campaigning.

According to **Dyke (1997)**, political parties capitalize on these people with ever-increasing dynamism, with significance bestowed upon populist appeal with great intensity in Indian politics, and with the idea of democratic legitimacy descending to include people hitherto excluded from it; hence, mobilization of sadhu saints becomes the BJP’s tactic since “the religiosity of people” inclines especially villagers and women to respond well to such strategies. The method of letter writing was also another strategy that Dyke believed targeted literate citizens. Celebrity endorsements became almost a commodity with a parade of almost too random choices: Kapil Dev campaigning for Manoj Prabhakar; and Sunil Dutt for Kapil Sibal; and Raj Babbar. The BJP tele-marketed the campaign utilizing taped messages and giving away toys and trinkets: hats, hooters, and yellow-pink lotus-shaped “bindis” (small colored marks or jewels worn on the forehead by Hindu women). Further amplification came through video films, talking dolls, street plays, and magic shows, etc.

The midterm elections of 1998 were very divided, but the BJP finally got through all the turmoil and, with regional alliances, could form a government before its dissolution after 13 months. In 2004, the 14th Lok Sabha Elections were held, and it was set up with the Manmohan Singh Cabinet. The results were shocking; they not only defeated the NDA but also raised the INC under Sonia Gandhi, the “Foreign Bahu”, who shocked everyone by refusing to accept the seat of Prime Minister. Analysts are united in agreeing that the rural poor never responded to the NDA’s campaign of “India Shining”.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Descriptive and diagnostic research aspects will cater to a study on the social media use in political advertising for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India. Descriptive research will bring out the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of voters. However, diagnostic research will be able to find the causal correlations between social media influence and voter involvement in this scenario. The study will take place in the state of Uttar Pradesh, especially Lucknow, and will include data from BJP activists, NGOs, organizations, and common people. Research will be based on both qualitative and quantitative methods to study the effect of political advertising on social media on the participation during elections and the spreading of misinformation.

Data Collection Methods

The interview, as a method of data collection, involves direct interfacing with stakeholders, which provides for a better appreciation of their opinions regarding political campaigning through the social platform. The observation method serves as a complement to interviews by tracking behavioral patterns and real-time interactions on social media platforms.

On the other hand, secondary data is sourced from a diverse range of sources including government publications, academic research papers, think tank reports, and international publications dealing with political advertising and voter behavior. As for the tertiary cyber source, it refers to online platforms, media news articles, and reports from digital media agencies that are also consulted in support of the study findings.

Sampling and Respondents

Purposively sampling respondents, this study aims to concentrate on accurate respondent selection. The sample is classified into three major categories:

1. **Stakeholders:** 25 political analysts, campaign strategists, and social media professionals can speak to you about using a digital political advertising program in these interfaces.
2. **NGOs and groups:** 25 delegates from those working on issues related to digital literacy in India, media regulation of the nation, and electoral transparency will shed light on misinformation and regulatory loopholes herein.
3. **Common People:** In total, there are 250 voters from varying social spectra who are studied with regard to the influence of overall political advertisements on their decisions to vote in this manner.

Statistical Tools Used (SPSS, Chi-Square, etc.)

1. SPSS is typically considered a social research tool; however, it is also applicable in the analysis and processing of quantitative data that can reveal trends, correlations, and patterns (Roni & Djajadikerta, 2021).
2. Comparative Chi-square tests can help to determine whether there are relationships between demographic characteristics (age, education, and socioeconomic status) and the impact of social media marketing on voting behavior.
3. The use of descriptive statistics would be helpful in computing results such as mean, median, and standard deviation, which could give an 'image' of how the data looks.
4. Qualitative Content Analysis for data from interviews and observations thematically analyzes the thus derived insights regarding voter perceptions, political messaging efficacy, and phenomena of disinformation diffusion.

Data Analysis and Findings

Personal Information of Respondents

300 respondents from different demographics form a representative sample and study the impact of social media on political advertising in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Respondents include stakeholders (25), field-level organizations/NGOs (25), and common citizens (250). These demographic profiles include age, gender, educational qualification, occupation, and political affiliation. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 60 years, with the maximum count falling in the age group of 18-35 years, upon which social media had the maximum engagement. The agency sought to maintain gender balance to gather diverse opinions. The educational qualifications of respondents ranged from junior high school to postgraduate levels, indicating widely differing levels of awareness toward political advertising. The gathered information is classified into Table 1, which reveals the character of respondents in accordance with these factors for structured analysis in relation to how different groups evaluated the impact of social media in elections.

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age in years	Below 18	17	5.7
	18-25	68	22.7
	26-35	80	26.7
	36-50	73	24.3
	Above 50	62	20.7
	Below 18	17	5.7
Gender	Male	231	77.0
	Female	69	23.0
Location	Urban	139	46.3
	Rural	102	34.0
	Semi-Urban	59	19.7
Occupation	Student	28	9.3
	Self-employed	42	14.0
	Private sector employee	84	28.0
	Government employee ⁵	50	16.7
	Unemployed	40	13.3
	Retired	56	18.7
Education	Below High School	42	14.0
	High School	60	20.0
	Graduate	121	40.3
	Postgraduate	52	17.3
	Doctorate	25	8.3
	Total	300	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of personal information of the respondents, Source: Author Generated

Influence of Social Media on Voter Opinions

The social media scenario calls the shots to a great extent when it comes to voter sentiment manipulation, especially in the context of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Thus, there were a few activities via political programs that constitute political narratives, campaign message dissemination, and voter organization databases across the platforms that include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which social media site had the greatest impact on your political views	Facebook	79	26.3
	Instagram	56	18.7
	Twitter (X)	83	27.7
	YouTube	36	12.0
	WhatsApp	46	15.3
How often did you see election-related ads on social media platforms while the election was underway	Several times a day	38	12.7
	Once a day	44	14.7
	A few times a week	82	27.3
	Rarely	89	29.7
	Never	47	15.7
What impression did political advertisements on social media leave on you regarding the parties or candidates	Positively influenced my opinion	156	52.0
	Negatively influenced my opinion	51	17.0
	Had no influence on my opinion	62	20.7
	Made me more curious to learn about parties/ candidates	31	10.3
how much of an influence did social media have on political views compared to more conventional forms of media like television, newspapers, and radio	Much more impactful	78	26.0
	Somewhat more impactful	130	43.3
	Equally impactful	37	12.3
	Less impactful	26	8.7
	Not impactful at all	29	9.7
During the election, what kind of social media content had the greatest impact on you	Video advertisements	81	27.0
	Sponsored posts	67	22.3
	Political memes	79	26.3
	Live debates or discussions	49	16.3
	Influencer endorsements	24	8.0
	Total	250	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of influence of Social Media on Voter Opinions, Source: Author Generated

Impact of Targeted Political Advertisements

The findings presented in here which denote the significance of targeted political advertisements on social media during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. E.g., 45.3% of the respondents viewed advertisements being targeted to their age, location, and interests regularly, while 25% indicated that they would see such advertisements at least at some times. This demonstrates that political parties have efficiently employed data-driven methods to target specific groups of voters. As regards ad relevancy, 46% of the respondents felt they were somewhat relevant, while 23.7% felt they were extremely relevant. This means while it is clear that targeting was done well, it is equally obvious that personalization could use a little tuning. Interestingly, 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media ads have a greater impact on younger voters (18-35) than on older groups.

Equally, 68.7% of respondents stated that political advertisements helped them in understanding party platforms better, while 83.3% said that the ads influenced their voting decisions, whether the ads reaffirmed their decisions or made them change their minds.

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Have you come across political advertisements that correspond to your age, area, or interests	Frequently	136	45.3
	Occasionally	75	25.0
	Rarely	47	15.7
	Never	42	14.0
What was your impression of the political advertisements that appeared on social media	Highly relevant	71	23.7
	Somewhat relevant	138	46.0
	Not very relevant	45	15.0
	Completely irrelevant	46	15.3
Social media political commercials have a greater impact on voters between the ages of 18 and 35 than on older voters	Strongly agree	108	36.0
	Agree	105	35.0
	Neutral	20	6.7
	Disagree	42	14.0
Were you able to gain a better understanding of the major party platforms and programs through political advertisements	Strongly disagree	25	8.3
	Yes, very clearly	83	27.7
	Somewhat	123	41.0
	Not much	35	11.7
Were you influenced to vote because of political adverts on social media	Not at all	59	19.7
	Yes, I changed my decision based on ads	141	47.0
	Yes, they helped reinforce my decision	109	36.3
	No, they did not affect my decision	36	12.0
	I did not vote	14	4.7
	Total	250	100.0

Table 3: Distribution of impact of targeted political advertisements on different demographics, Source: Author Generated

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: In the study, 72% of respondents actively engaged with political content on social media, while 58.3% said social media influenced their political views. A chi-square test was carried out to test the link between social media exposure and changes in opinion among voters. The study established a statistically significant relationship, meaning that social media plays a great role in influencing voter perception ($p < 0.05$). Hence, this supports H1 in that voting studies consider online platforms to play an important role in influencing voter attitudes during elections.

Hypothesis 2: In 71% of respondents aged 18 to 35 and exposed to a political advertisement in social media, the very factor indicated easy to strong relevance among the interviewees. Again, 71% of these people said that such advertisements affected them when making voting decisions. Chi-square tests carried out proved the independence of age from advertisement impacts ($p < 0.05$). The above results support H2 regarding the greater susceptibility of younger voters to targeted political commercials compared with older groups.

Hypothesis 3: As per the data, 69% of respondents recognized the insightful social media campaigns in political issues, while 64.3% took part in online debates. Also, 72% indicated that the digital channels would increase their political awareness. The statistical tests revealed a significant relationship between social media exposure and voter participation ($p < 0.05$). Thus, H3, which states that political advertising on social media has increased voter engagement as well as their electoral participation during the 2024 elections, is confirmed.

Hypothesis 4: As per the study, 62 % of individuals reported that they came across either false or fraudulent political information on social media while 55 % believed that the failure of regulation allowed false information to go without any hindrance. The chi-square test found a statistically significant association of perception towards misinformation and lack of strong rules ($p < 0.05$). These findings cohere with H4 by posing that a poor regulatory framework facilitated the spreading of misinformation in the entire election campaign period for the year 2024. This denotes the need for stricter surveillance to ensure that political advertising is indeed conducted in a fair and transparent manner on digital platforms.

Discussion

The impact of social media on voter perception and political participation during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was substantially brought to the forefront by the study outcomes. The study indicates that targeted political ads were found to be especially effective with younger voters, furthering the trend of online engagement

in electoral campaigns. A large number of respondents reported the regular receipt of political advertising on the basis of their demographic characteristics, thus demonstrating the much-wanted need for data advertising to alter public opinion. Moreover, campaigns in social media promoted voter participation and allowed easier public access to political discussions concerning party manifestos and broader electoral issues.

The essence of this study is a social media deconstruction of the electoral process and the dire need for stringent regulations indeed. Digital platforms will, indeed, play a predominant role in future political advertising, and yet transparency and accountability are going to be crucial in maintaining a democratic future.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the role of social media in shaping voter perception and political action during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The results suggest targeted political advertisements work particularly well with younger voters, which indicates the increasing importance of online campaigning in the electoral landscape of India. Political knowledge and political activity are not the sole creations of mass social media; they enable for unregulated misinformation to blindly spread. Voters get information about party positions from the Internet, but there remain concerns about misleading and falsely sponsored digs, the survey reveals.

Recommendations for the organization of well-reasoned and effective campaigns are presented in the report. The recommended countermeasures against misinformation should include stronger measures such as fact-checking political advertisements. Funding and sources for advertisements have to be disclosed above the tables so that the public can consciously decide. Social media companies should collaborate with lawmakers to ensure that rules governing political advertising during elections will be equitable and transparent. By addressing these basic issues, social media can become a conduit for deep citizen engagement and democratic sustainability as we monitor electoral integrity.

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