International Journal of Social Science and Humanities
www.humanitiesjournals.com
ISSN: 2664-8628
Received: 12-09-2026, Accepted: 12-10-2026, Published: 27-10-2026
Volume 8, Issue 4, 2026, Page No. 44-47

Influence of social media on voting behaviour among young voters in Uttar Pradesh: An empirical study

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.66856/ijssh.2026.8.4.8152

Abstract
Social media is an integral platform for political communication. It has facilitated the voter's access to information about elections, enabled him/her to formulate political opinion about political parties, candidates, and public issues. It is important to take into account the youth, especially. The present paper tries to shed light on the effect of social media on the voting behaviour of young voters in Uttar Pradesh. It will be the social media's involvement in political awareness, voting participation, reliability of information received through social media, and voting decisions that will be studied. The paper will be of descriptive and analytical type; drawing on secondary sources from the Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS and scholarly articles. The opportunities created by social media for young voters to engage in political communication are expected. However, the fact that other important factors such as family and socioeconomic factors should not be overlooked is not ignored. The research project hopes to discover effects of misinformation and the lack of information in social media. The paper will be concluded with highlighting the context relevance of social media in the political communication process and making suggestions for further studies on social media-votes relationship in Uttar Pradesh.

Keywords: Social Media, Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS, political communication

Introduction

The development of information and communication technologies has fundamentally changed the nature of political communication. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and X have created opportunities for more accessible and participatory means of sharing and acquiring information about politics. Traditional communication channels, including newspapers, books, journals, and magazines, have been the exclusive source of information about the political processes. In contrast, social media has empowered individuals to become both consumers and producers of political information. India is among the countries where smartphones and internet users have significantly increased over the years. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India and Kantar, the number of internet users in 2024 was 886 million, including 488 million rural users. The same report recorded the number of social media users at 655 million, also with a higher percentage of rural inhabitants. It must be noted that the number of internet users registered in India is not the number of voters or politically inclined people. Nonetheless, the statistic illustrates the extent to which social media has reached Indian society. It has become possible for Indians to communicate via the internet and participate in political processes. The next question that emerges is whether the use of social media influences the voters' choices and behaviours. The present paper will seek to review and explore this issue with a focus on the young population of Uttar Pradesh. According to the Election Commission of India, Uttar Pradesh has the largest number of voters, with approximately 154.4 million registered voters. In the state, 21.19% of the voters are between the ages of 18 and 29, as compared to the national average of 22.78%. This statistic demonstrates the significance of exploring the political behaviour of the young population of Uttar Pradesh [Boulianne, 2015] [1]. In this regard, the paper will review the opportunities for political communication available to the young voters. Traditionally, voters acquire information about the political processes through newspapers, television, education, family, community leaders, friends, WhatsApp groups, and social media. In particular, social media has enabled people to receive information about government policies, politicians' stands on various issues, electoral guidelines and procedures, and other relevant information. Digital communication may also create opportunities for informal discussion of political matters among people who do not traditionally interact. This implies that social media may affect the voting choices and behaviours [Internet and Mobile Association of India & Kantar, 2025] [5].

However, the mere availability of information does not mean that it has a considerable impact on people's decisions. For example, some individuals may continue holding the same political views despite receiving information about politics through social media. In contrast, some voters may use social media as an opportunity to strengthen their existing views. Therefore, it is essential to analyse actual data about the level of social media engagement and its influence on voters' attitudes and behaviors. The current study will review secondary data on the electoral statistics, parliamentary elections, national surveys, and scholarly articles. In particular, the paper will focus on Uttar Pradesh as the area of the study. It is expected that the findings will demonstrate how political information from social media contributes to voters' awareness about elections and politics in general.

Research Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive and analytical research design informed by secondary quantitative evidence and academic literature. The regional focus of the study is Uttar Pradesh, but national-level findings are integrated to provide the background for digital political communication in India. The young voter category refers to individuals aged between 18 and 29 years, consistent with the age category reported by the Election Commission in its 2024 statistical publication. The Election

Commission of India's 2024 electoral statistics, Lokniti–CSDS Social and Political Barometer Prepoll Study 2024, National Election Study 2024 methodology documentation, and IAMAI–Kantar Internet in India report are cited as the main sources of evidence. Academic research on media exposure, political participation, and voting behaviour informs the present analysis. The Lokniti–CSDS 2024 prepoll survey involved 10,019 respondents and focused on political attitudes, social media usage, and information credibility. The National Election Study 2024 post-poll survey involved

19,663 respondents in 23 states, including 2,494 unweighted interviews in Uttar Pradesh. Both surveys represent separate pieces of research, and their findings are analysed accordingly. The key explanatory variable of the present study is social media usage, encompassing frequency, exposure to political messages, preferred platforms, and trust in information. The dependent variable is voting behaviour, which includes electoral participation, political preferences, and reported voting decisions. Age, education, gender, socioeconomic background, locality, and political interest are considered potential independent variables.

The present analysis involves descriptive interpretation of published frequencies and percentages. The findings of different sources are cross-referenced to identify potential associations requiring further investigation. The present study does not report questionnaire responses, regression coefficients, or statistical significance values because the necessary respondent-level data on the association between social media exposure and voting behaviour in young voters in Uttar Pradesh were not available.

Results and Findings

Electoral Significance of Young Voters

One of the main conclusions of the Electoral Commission's Electoral Statistics 2024 is the presence of the youth in the electorate of Uttar Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh 21.19% of the voters were in the age group of 18-29 years while 22.78% of the voters were in this age group across the country. Another key factor in the political communication analysis of the size of the young voter population. But the evidence at hand does not provide any clear answer on how exposure to social media has impacted youth voting in Uttar Pradesh or their political inclination. There are several stages in electoral participation: voter registration through the final decision to vote or not to vote. The elements of the voting behaviour paradigm can be linked to digital media. Greater exposure to voter registration information is correlated with greater awareness, which contributes to electoral participation, but may not be correlated with a positive attitude towards a candidate [Election Commission of India, 2025; IAMAI & Kantar, 2025] [2].

Patterns of Social Media Usage

The Lokniti-CSDS 2024 prepoll survey gives descriptive data on the use of social media by Indian voters. As per the published results 33.2% of respondents said that they use WhatsApp many times a day, while 30.9% use YouTube in the same manner. 17.3%, 15.6% and 3.9% of respondents reported using Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (X) frequently, respectively. These results are based on the national sample of respondents and cannot be considered as representative of the social media penetration level in Uttar Pradesh. The results are in line with those of the previous study in that they confirm that digital political communication is not limited to only a single platform. Messengers are used for communicating with other users via chats and groups, and video and social media hosting platforms provide the opportunity to consume video. However, there are key differences in the technical features of these communication channels that can impact interaction with electoral information. More in-depth research is needed to determine if there is a relationship between these differences and voting. The LoknitiCSDS survey in 2024 examined the extent to which the citizens were exposed to political messaging on social media. The data reveals that 11.0% of the respondents got political messages a lot and 31.3% got them sometimes. Another 15.1% of respondents said that they seldom get those messages, while 25.5% of respondents reported never receiving those messages. Lastly, 17.1% of respondents did not know if they had received political messages using social media. Overall, the results show a significant difference in exposure to political content by Indian voters via the digital medium [Guess *et al*., 2019; Election Commission of India, 2024] [3, 4].

Social Media and Political Awareness

As per the IAMAI–Kantar report, in India, some 582 million people used the Internet to access news in 2024 using different digital devices. The report makes a distinction between exposure to news and seeking information, and this is also reflected at the electoral level. Social media is not the same as news exposure in this regard, when it comes to being aware of political issues. However, higher exposure can be correlated with better factual knowledge among political science students, voters and the general public. The results indicate that political messages have the ability to raise the electoral awareness of the electorate by providing basic information about the electoral system, news about the issues that are of concern and information about the stances of the various parties. These links do occur at the aggregate level, however, and more research is needed to determine the extent to which exposure to news via social media channels impacts factual knowledge among voters. In this regard, the testing of specific hypothesis on these associations is more suitable than general impressions of increased political awareness [Lokniti–CSDS, 2019; Lokniti–CSDS, 2024a; Lokniti–CSDS, 2024b] [6, 7, 8].

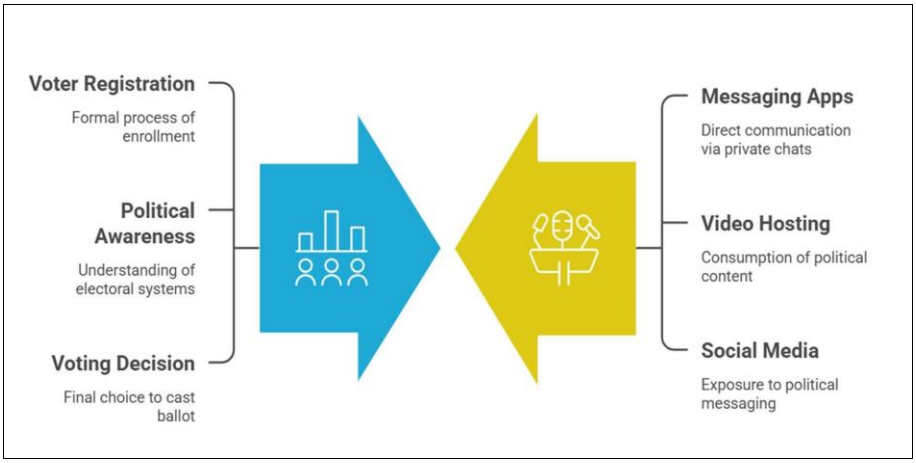


Fig 1: Digital Influence on Electoral Participation

Discussion

Social Media and Political Engagement

Political participation encompasses multiple dimensions. Posting a political message, liking a video, commenting on an issue, attending a public meeting, and marking a vote are all different types of behaviour. The connection between them deserves independent assessment. A voter may engage in online political discussions without altering an established preference, and another may receive valuable electoral information without commenting on a political topic. Frequency of social media use needs to be analysed in relation to the type and purpose of engagement.

Rural–Urban Differences

The growth of rural internet penetration adds a new dimension to the analysis. The
IAMAI–Kantar findings show that rural India contributed significantly to internet user numbers in 2024. However, national statistics do not indicate whether all members of a community have equal access to digital devices, to the reliability of the internet connection, to digital literacy, or to political information. A particular focus in Uttar Pradesh should therefore examine whether young voters in different locations have similar information environments. Ownership of smartphones, shared use of devices, the affordability of mobile data, language settings, and the availability of alternative news sources all affect the extent and nature of an individual's exposure to political information. The impact of social media use on voting behaviour should therefore be analysed in relation to broader access to technology and to financial resources.

Existing Political Preferences and Selective Exposure

One of the key issues of measuring the influence of social media is the difference between persuasion and selective exposure. People with preconceived notions about politics may try to find out only what is in line with their beliefs. People can watch and follow some political personalities, join a discussion group and steer clear of a web site they think is biased. Under these conditions, there is no evidence that exposure to social media leads to the formation of new preferences but it reinforces existing ones. This is consistent with empirical evidence that indicates that there is different levels of association between media exposure and votes between demographic groups. A better research method for the youth vote in UP would be to compare opinions before and after a certain amount of time online. This would help to understand shifts in opinion, as well as preferences that persist.

Limitations of the Study

The research was not conducted in the field, but rather by analyzing published secondary data. The national survey results are helpful in understanding the digital engagement but not the uttar pradesh citizens aged 18-29 who vote. The study cannot therefore make any links between the popularity of a social media platform and voting decisions in this state. Another limitation relates to the use of self-reported behaviour. They may think that they do things differently from what is actually happening or that they have more influence than they really do. In addition, the datasets analysed are collected from various populations, using different questions, and for different time periods. All of the above factors should be considered in evaluating the results.

Conclusion

Social media have become an integral part in the contemporary political communication landscape in India. When applied to youth voters, it relates to the ability to spread information, to spur discussion and to bring people into a multitude of public issues. The results of the present study reveal that there are connections between the use of digital media and political participation, but they are not uniform across the demographic groups and are not causal. However, for the state of Uttar Pradesh, despite the absence of granular data, there is scope to investigate further as the scale of the young electorate is huge, and the impact that social media can have on individual voters' decisions is not quantified. The study concludes that the researchers should adopt an integrated approach to examine voting behaviour and account for digital media, prior political dispositions, socioeconomic factors, credibility of information and offline influences.

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