



Electoral politics in the digital era: Political parties, social media and voter behaviour in India

Jadi Ravi

Department of Political Science, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66856/ijsp.2026.8.2.8104>

Abstract

In today's Indian society, the rise of digital media has drastically changed political politics. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X have developed into crucial venues for political mobilization, electoral campaigns, and communication between political parties and the general public. Digital platforms are being used by political parties more frequently to spread campaign messaging, elevate leaders, target particular voter demographics, recruit volunteers, and sway public opinion. By giving citizens instant access to political information and fostering new avenues for political engagement, the growth of digital politics has also altered voter behavior. Simultaneously, the digitalization of electoral politics has brought up a number of issues, such as political manipulation, deepfakes, hate speech, online polarization, misinformation, and unequal access to digital technologies. The Indian Election Commission has placed a strong emphasis on the ethical and responsible use of social media during elections, and it has expressed particular worries about content that has been altered or produced by artificial intelligence. This study looks at how social media, political parties, and voters interact in India. It makes the case that while digital media has increased opportunities for political engagement, it has also created new obstacles for democratic accountability and electoral integrity.

Keywords: Digital democracy, electoral politics, political parties, social media, voter behaviour, political communication, electoral mobilization, misinformation, India, Democracy

Introduction

The approaches by which political parties interact with the public and run election campaigns have undergone significant changes in Indian democracy. Political parties have historically relied significantly on public gatherings, rallies, newspapers, radio, television, posters, pamphlets, and personal connections. Election politics now have a new dimension due to the internet's and social media's explosive growth. Political parties and candidates can now interact directly with a huge number of citizens through digital channels rather than relying solely on traditional media outlets.

During the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, political parties increasingly employed Facebook, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp for campaign communication and voter mobilization, highlighting the significance of social media. According to scholarly study on the 2014 election, social media has developed into a significant online forum for discussing and debating political issues. More recent studies contend that by allowing parties to create direct, volunteer-driven communication networks, platforms like WhatsApp have changed the organizational structure of electoral communication.

As an outcome, digital politics has altered both how political parties run their campaigns and how the public receives political information. Voters can instantly voice their thoughts, share political content, watch speeches, follow political leaders, and take part in online debates. In India, attention-driven political communication has become even more crucial thanks to Instagram Reels, short films, and other visual media.

But digital democracy also poses significant difficulties. Artificial intelligence may be used to produce modified audio-visual content, false information can spread quickly, and political content can become extremely divisive. As a

result, the Election Commission has placed a strong emphasis on responsible social media campaigning and taking action against content created by AI that is illegal or deceptive. Therefore, the digital transformation of electoral politics poses a threat to the standard of democratic debate as well as a chance for more engagement.

Electoral Politics in the Digital Era

The organization, communication, and conduct of electoral politics in India have seen substantial changes as a result of the digital era. Digital networks like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X are rapidly being used by political parties to interact with voters. Election speeches, manifestos, campaign films, policy messaging, infographics, interviews, and short-form content may all be swiftly and affordably disseminated by parties and candidates thanks to these platforms. As a result, traditional strategies including public gatherings, protests, newspapers, television, posters, and door-to-door campaigning have been enhanced by digital communication. Political groups can now engage with various segments of the population and reach geographically distant audiences thanks to the growth of digital media.

Political communication is now more dynamic and constant thanks to digital campaigns. Through blogs, live broadcasts, videos, and online debates, political leaders can interact with the public prior to, during, and following elections. Additionally, social media helps political parties and leaders create identifiable online personas and stay in touch with their supporters. In response, citizens have the ability to share content, take part in debates, comment on political statements, and react right away to campaign activities. As a result, digital platforms are now crucial venues for public discourse, agenda-setting, political image-building, and electoral mobilization.

The growing use of data and targeted communication is another significant aspect of digital electoral campaigns. Political organizations can create messaging targeted at specific demographic or geographic groups by looking at online engagement trends. These tactics present issues with privacy, political manipulation, disinformation, and the development of highly segmented information environments, even while they can help campaigns become more responsive and well-organized.

Political Parties and Digital Campaigning

Social media is becoming a more important aspect of political parties' organizational and electoral campaigns. Digital platforms give political parties and politicians the chance to interact directly with voters, react quickly to political happenings, advertise campaign initiatives, and outline their political stances. Campaign messages may swiftly reach massive audiences using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X. As a result, political parties are now less reliant on conventional methods of campaigning including public gatherings, newspapers, television, and printed materials. Throughout the election process, parties may stay in constant contact with their followers thanks to digital campaigning. Political volunteers now play a bigger part in election campaigns because of social media. Without having to physically attend party headquarters or public rallies, supporters can produce, distribute, and spread campaign content via their own networks. This makes it possible for political messages to spread quickly throughout groups and social networks and develops new types of participatory campaigning. Political parties fight for public attention, engagement, and internet presence at the same time. The clarity of political messages, visual presentation, emotional appeal, and content's capacity to reach larger audiences may all have an impact on how successful digital campaigns are. Additionally, responsible political communication has become more crucial in the internet age. According to the Election Commission of India, political parties and candidates' online and social media posts are subject to the Model Code of Conduct. Additionally, it forbids actions that could incite animosity or conflict between communities as well as appeals to caste or communal sentiments in order to win votes. Because political ideas may travel quickly and reach vast audiences, these principles are especially pertinent in digital campaigns.

Social Media as a Tool of Political Mobilization

New avenues for political mobilization have been made possible by social media. To mobilize supporters and spread campaign messaging, political parties might use Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, YouTube channels, WhatsApp groups, and other platforms. Younger people might be encouraged to engage in political discourse through digital communication. Crucially, citizens can now remark, discuss, critique, and reinterpret political communicating, meaning that communication is no longer only one-way. However, online division, misinformation, emotionally charged content, and algorithmic amplification can also complicate democratic discourse. Social media is therefore a potent tool for political engagement as well as a major obstacle to ethical electoral communication.

Social Media and Political Communication

By bringing political leaders, political parties, and citizens closer together, social media has completely changed political communication in India. Leaders can interact directly with the public via posts, videos, live broadcasts, interviews, and short-form content on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X. In addition to explaining policy, promoting campaign messages, and trying to influence public perceptions of elections, political parties are able to react quickly to political changes. Social media makes political communication more instantaneous and participatory by enabling citizens to reply through comments, shares, likes, and discussions, in contrast to traditional communication methods. The Election Commission of India has acknowledged that content uploaded by political parties and candidates on the internet and social media platforms is subject to its election-related regulations and directives. These days, the visual aspect of digital platforms is especially crucial. Memes, images, Instagram Reels, and short films can all convey political concepts in a succinct and eye-catching way. The increasing impact of platform-based attention and influencer-style communication on political discourse is shown by recent research on Instagram Reels in India, which looks at how political parties employ themes, emotions, and visual styles to create their digital representation.

Additionally, social media has diminished the traditional function of media gatekeepers. Instead of depending solely on newspapers or television outlets, political parties and leaders can interact directly with followers. By offering different information sources and enabling citizens to take part more actively in public discourse, this can increase political communication. However, the same setting can make it easier for false information, unsubstantiated assertions, politicized narratives, and emotionally charged content to spread quickly. As a result, the Election Commission has placed a strong emphasis on the ethical and responsible use of internet media during elections.

Social Media and Voter Behaviour

The manner that many Indian voters obtain, receive, and analyze political information have been profoundly altered by digital media. Citizens are more frequently exposed to political speeches, election promises, news stories, opinion surveys, campaign commercials, memes, brief videos, and political commentary through social media feeds due to the increased usage of smartphones and internet-based platforms. As a result, political information is now more readily available and instantaneous, and voters now have more ways to interact with electoral problems outside of public gatherings, television, and traditional newspapers. As a result, social media has grown in significance as a component of the information landscape that shapes voters' political beliefs.

Social media can affect voter behavior by influencing how people view political parties, leaders, policies, and significant public problems. Citizens' perceptions of political events and politicians may be influenced by ongoing exposure to specific political narratives. By uniting people with similar political views, online conversations can help reinforce preexisting political identities. Simultaneously, social media platforms have the potential to promote political engagement among citizens who might not

have previously demonstrated much interest in election matters. New kinds of political participation can be produced via sharing political content, leaving comments on postings, taking part in online debates, and supporting political personalities.

But voting behavior should not be solely determined by social media. Voters in India make decisions about elections in a complicated social and political context. Political preferences can be greatly influenced by a variety of factors, including caste, class, religion, area, gender, leadership, economic situations, welfare policies, local issues, party structure, candidate reputation, and individual experiences with government performance. Age, education, region, digital access, and political interest can all affect how much of an impact social media provides.

Digital Democracy: Opportunities and Challenges

In India, digital democracy has opened up new avenues for communication and political engagement. Digital platforms can give citizens quicker access to government announcements, political information, election-related content, and political representatives' opinions. Additionally, social media allows people to express their political views, take part in public debates, and speak with political officials directly. Digital platforms can offer more venues for political speech and visibility for groups that might not have easy access to traditional media. Digital technologies have the potential to increase engagement and generate new channels of communication between citizens, political parties, candidates, and democratic institutions.

But there are also a lot of difficulties with digital democracy. Through social media platforms and message networks, misinformation and disinformation can spread quickly, thereby undermining public comprehension and confidence in democratic institutions. While algorithmically generated political information may create echo chambers where viewers are constantly exposed to opinions similar to their own, online hate speech and extremely politicized communication can exacerbate already-existing social divisions. Constructive political discourse may become more challenging as a result of these trends. The Indian Election Commission has cautioned political parties against abusing artificial intelligence to produce deepfakes or deceptive content, and it has highlighted the ethical and responsible use of social media during elections.

These difficulties now have an additional dimension due to the advancement of artificial intelligence. Citizens may find it challenging to discern between authentic political communication and altered content due to deepfakes and synthetic voice, video, and graphics. The Election Commission mandated that AI-generated or digitally modified campaign materials be conspicuously labeled during the 2026 elections, including with terms like "AI-Generated," "Digitally Enhanced," or "Synthetic Content."

The digital gap is another significant issue. Smartphones, dependable internet connections, digital skills, and online information are not equally accessible to all citizens. As a result, digital campaigning can increase political engagement for affiliated groups while erecting obstacles for others. Therefore, in order to guaranty that technological advancement promotes inclusive and informed democratic involvement, it is imperative to increase digital literacy, accessibility, transparency, and responsible online communication.

Social Media, Electoral Integrity and Democratic Accountability

India's democratic accountability and electoral integrity are facing new difficulties as a result of the growth of digital campaigning. Responsible and legal political communication is crucial since political parties and candidates are using social media more and more to interact with voters. Guidelines for political advertising, election-related communication, and campaign behavior are provided by the Election Commission of India. Access to accurate and trustworthy information on political parties and candidates is another prerequisite for democratic accountability. Therefore, it is becoming more and more crucial to be transparent about campaign spending, online political advertising, and digitally produced material. In the digital election environment, public scrutiny and accountability can be strengthened by disclosing political-party spending.

Conclusion

In India, democratic communication and electoral politics have seen tremendous transformation with the advent of the digital age. Digital platforms are being used by political parties more and more to interact with the public, plan campaigns, rally followers, elevate political leaders, and spread information about policies and election plans. Social media sites like Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become to be significant venues for political discourse and voting. Digital platforms, in contrast to traditional campaign tactics, make it possible for political communications to swiftly reach vast audiences and for citizens to reply, share, comment, and take part in political debates. Voters and political parties now have a more direct, ongoing, and participatory interaction as a result.

Political parties' tactics have also changed as a result of digital campaigning. Videos, memes, infographics, live broadcasts, hashtags, and short-form content can all be used by political organizations to spread their message and draw in viewers. Through their own networks, online volunteers and supporters can further disseminate campaign materials, generating new avenues for political mobilization. Voter participation has also evolved as a result of the increased significance of digital communication, especially among younger and more technologically savvy demographics. However, there are other factors that influence voting behavior than social media. Election decisions are still influenced by caste, class, religion, regional identity, leadership, economic circumstances, welfare policies, local issues, and individual experiences with governance.

The digital development of Indian democracy also poses a number of difficulties. The quality of democratic participation can be impacted by misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, political polarization, manipulated material, deepfakes, privacy issues, and unequal access to digital technologies. Because digitally altered audio, photos, and videos can make it challenging for citizens to discern between real and fake content, the growing usage of artificial intelligence raises these concerns. Thus, protecting electoral integrity increasingly depends on responsible digital campaigning, transparency, media literacy, and efficient institutional oversight.

As a result, digital democracy should be viewed as a more comprehensive shift in political communication, electoral mobilization, and citizen participation than just a

technological advancement. The way that political parties, individuals, technological platforms, civil society organizations, and electoral institutions react to the opportunities and difficulties presented by digital media will determine its democratic relevance. While open campaign methods can enhance public accountability, increasing digital literacy can assist voters in critically assessing political material. Establishing and upholding suitable guidelines for online political communication is another crucial function of electoral institutions.

In summary, striking a balance between technology innovation and democratic responsibility will determine the future of Indian digital democracy. Digital platforms have the potential to increase political engagement and open up new channels of communication, but these advantages depend on informed citizens, accountable political actors, open institutions, and protections against exclusion and manipulation. Therefore, informed engagement, political plurality, accountability, transparency, privacy, and polite democratic discourse should all be encouraged in a robust digital democracy. In this way, the digital revolution in electoral politics is both a significant advancement in the ongoing development of Indian democracy and a shift in the means of campaigning.

References

1. Chadwick A. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
2. Howard PN. *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
3. Jenkins H. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, 2006.
4. Kanungo NT. India's digital poll battle: Political parties and social media in the 16th Lok Sabha elections. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 2015, 3(2).
5. Kruikemeier S. How political candidates use Twitter and the impact on votes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2014;34:131–139.
6. McNair B. *An Introduction to Political Communication*. Routledge, 2018.
7. Norris P. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
8. Pariser E. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. Penguin Press, 2011.
9. Shirky C. The Political Power of Social Media. *Foreign Affairs*, 2011;90(1):28–41.
10. Election Commission of India. *Model Code of Conduct for the Guidance of Political Parties and Candidates*.
11. Election Commission of India. *Political Parties/Candidates: Guidelines, Expenditure and Accountability*.
12. Election Commission of India. *Election Manifestos: Guidelines and Instructions*.
13. Press Information Bureau, Government of India. *ECI directs responsible and ethical use of social media platforms by political parties and their representatives*, 2024.
14. Press Information Bureau, Government of India. *General Elections and bye-elections 2026: ECI action on unlawful social media content*, 2026.
15. 'Awate A. *Digital Democracy in India: Social Media, Political Communication, and the Transformation of Electoral Mobilization*. SSRN, 2026.