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Digital echo chambers: social media's effect on voter attitudes during elections: A review

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Abstract

This review explores the multifaceted impact of social media on voter attitudes during election periods, emphasizing its transformative role in political discourse, connectivity, and communication. Anchored in foundational theories of media influence, the paper examines how digital platforms shape content creation and information flow, especially in the high-stakes context of elections. While social media empowers marginalized voices and facilitates greater political participation, it also amplifies misinformation, polarization, digital surveillance, and privacy concerns. Using the 2019 Indian general elections and the 2024 U.S. presidential election as case studies, the paper investigates the dynamics of microtargeting, voter manipulation, and ideological echo chambers. It argues for the urgent need for robust regulatory frameworks, enhanced digital literacy, and ethical oversight to mitigate the risks posed by unchecked digital influence. Ultimately, this review underscores the critical role of governance, policy innovation, and public awareness in navigating the evolving relationship between social media and democratic processes.

Keywords: Social media, ethnicity, democracy, public perception

Introduction

Section One: General Framework

Social media has become a daily part of our lives for over a decade and its onset has become a boon and a curse for mankind. So that asks the question, what exactly is Social media? Social media is a technology that facilitates the interaction of "users" through the use of contents. These contents may vary through a degree of things. These are usually considered a form of expression. (Obar and Wildman, 2015) ^[50]. Social media has been providing online platforms to create and share contents. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010a) ^[33]. Some of the major examples of these platforms are facebook, Instagram, youtube etc. The contents that are being shared in these online platforms may vary greatly depending upon the service provider and also their compatability. These may be text, photos, videos and also may be data generated. One of the features, which can be either beneficiary or negative depending upon the circumstances is that it helps in maintaining anonymity. In most social media platforms one user is connected to another user through mechanisms known as profile (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) ^[14].

Breaking down the word social media, the word social suggesting the formations and communal functions through the use of media regardless of their dissemination's method. Social media helps in creating and extending human networks. How to access this? This is done mainly through custom mobile applications by the service providers that are creating these platforms or through their direct web pages (*The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media - Jose van Dijck - Google Books*, n.d.). Modern day is all about social media, it has taken almost all lives across the globe has been taken over social media networks like facebook, youtube, Instagram and the likes (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010b) ^[34]. Social media users (daily, weekly, monthly and rarely, combined), 2014-2019 (%) (Lokniti CSDS, 2019) ^[37]

As we as a community are more and more engaged in the whirlwinds of social media, it has become an integral part of our life and everyone regardless of their caste and creed are entangled in this web of interconnectedness. As with any media or innovation that has become a major part of human civilization, social media has also a wide variety of positive

and negative aspects that requires special highlight. In a country like India, where the population is large and is divided by various geographical and cultural barriers, the effects of social media can be quite polarizing. Discussing the effects of social media, it is important to establish the positives of social media within and across the country and also the globe. The most important and talked about advantage of social media is its ability to increase and enhance the communications and connectivity across the masses regardless their language and socio-economic backgrounds. It helps in breaking the geographical barriers that are separating one another from connecting with each other as they are united in a virtual space within the social media platform. With the world becoming more and more open and the continents not being limited to one ethnicity and language, the existence of social media communities helps in people connect with others of the same community or ethnicity in different parts of the world. Long past are the days of letters and telegraphs where it took weeks or months depending upon the destination and carrier for the message to be received by the recipient. With the emergence of platforms like whatsapp, telegram, Instagram and the likes, real time communication has taken forefront in terms of communication and connecting with others, wheather it be for personal or professional matter. Another important aspect of social media is the dissemination and availability of information much faster and to a larger audience. Social media platforms like “X” (previously twitter) and facebook are great places for access to opinions and articles related to wide range of information may it be related to art, finance or sports. As much as information is being shared just as much misinformation is spread, but the emergence of individuals and verified channels helps in reducing the spread of these misinformation and fact checking anything that is being shared without proper sources. The major benefactors of social media may most probably be businesses and other commercial establishments. Social media is a goldmine in providing a stage for marketing and experimenting with marketing models. Platforms such as whatsapp and Instagram has been very much conductive of these businesses and has enabled separate “business” version of these platforms which has ensured that small businesses and entrepreneurs use these more “simple” alternatives rather than relying upon physical stores. Social media has also emerged itself as a job creating industry. The rise of influencers and content creators has been helping those with non academic skills to gain financial independence. These include social media marketing, digital adverts and content creation. Social media has also helped in making the world a more aware one. Crimes against women and children used to go unnoticed or made public which has let many perpetrators roam freely, with the rise of many justice movements such as #metoo, there has been a rise to seek justice for the victims and expose those who have wronged them. Social media has been instrumental in highlighting social issues and mobilizing the public towards a goal. This is really important as it also helps in creating awareness regarding many other issues such global warming, climate change and pollution among others. Social media has also enabled the reduction in the disparity between accessibility to education as platforms like youtube and Unacademy has enabled people of different class groups access to education and materials at a cheap price or for free. It has enabled government to launch digital learning with initiatives like

SWAYAM and DIKSHA. Services like LinkedIn has enabled freshers and qualified individuals access to job by direct networks to hiring managers and other personnel. Social media has also enabled in government and other NGO’s in spreading awareness regarding many societal and health issues prevalent in the country. This was especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic where government and health organization was able to disseminate information to a larger population in a much efficient way. It has also helped in spreading good health practices among the masses and led to revolution regarding the implementation and adoption of balanced and healthy diets, atleast to the urban audience. It has also enabled the increasing recognition and promotion of a particular culture to a global audience. Niche and financially struggling artists and creators where able to get a much wider reach and success with the practicality of social media. The most important aspect of social media is its evergrowing influence upon public perception regarding politics with both political parties and regular civilians in shaping opinions and holding authorities and candidates accountable and raising a successful campaign for victories in elections. Social media has enabled in reducing monopoly regarding information and other digital commodities essentially democratizing them.

Platform	May 2014	May 2017	May 2018	May 2019
Facebook	9%	20%	32%	32%
WhatsApp	-	22%	33%	34%
Twitter	2%	5%	14%	12%
Instagram	-	-	14%	15%
YouTube	-	-	-	31%

As much as social media has enabled us to be more connected and knowledgeable regarding many things happening in the country and around the globe, it has also garnered its fair share of negative aspects that makes navigating through it difficult for novices and inexperienced individuals. One of the most alarming and significant drawback that has come up with the rise of social media is the spread of misinformation. Fake news and half-truths has been allowed to spread like wildfire due to the unmoderated nature of private chatgroups like those that are provided by Whatsapp and Telegram. This has been capitalized by many groups such as political parties which use these platforms to influence elections and public perception in favour of them by manipulating voters. In a country like India, where the cultural and religious diversity is unmatched across the globe the spread of fake news and misinformation may lead to communal riots and further divide within the country. This fake news is not just limited to the political spectrum but also to other areas such as healthcare and social well-being. Promotion of unhealthy practices in the name of tradition by influencers and the rise of pseudo-science podcasts may result in deteriorating health and unhealthy life style due to spread of fake cures and rise in anti-vaccine tendencies. The rise in AI within the social media realm has also raised ethical concerns regarding the use of technology such as deepfakes for defamation and thus swaying public opinion. There has been an increase in the number of cybercrimes along with the rise in social media usage across the country. The rise of cybercrimes are increasing at an alarming rate. One of the most recent scams that have originated across the country is the defrauding of hard-earned money by intimidating victims by falsely accusing them of illegal activities (*What Is ‘Digital Arrest Scam’ and*

How Can You Protect Yourself? - The Hindu, n.d.). Theft of identity by using the data of unprotected users are also a major problem as it can lead to a cascading effect by making others interacting with the affected users also at risk. Scammers are also quick to take advantage of the growing unemployment in the subcontinent by extracting money after promising false jobs. As much as any other part of the internet, social media also faces problems regarding the breaching of privacy and personal data. But unlike unofficial sites and shady places, many renowned platforms like facebook and Instagram (both under the same banner - meta) are accused to stealing data of its users and trading it for money. Authoritarian governments across the world and some democratic governments have been using social media to monitor and use user data against its citizens while others like china has completely gone into an internet quarantine with complete ban on foreign social media apps while providing native alternatives. Hacking and leaks due to server mismanagement are also major concerns regarding social media. Coming from a materialistic aspect to a more intellectual and psychological aspects of social media, it has set unrealistic standards regarding beauty standards which has led to gaining unwanted stress and loss in confidence among young adults and teenagers. There also repeated reports of children getting addicted to social media where instant gratification is built into each and every one of the apps. This has lead to increased exposure to events like cyberbullying and sleep disruptions which can inversely affect the mental health of its users. There are also concerns regarding exposure to inappropriate contents especially to minors. This addictive nature of social media has also affected the attention span of students across the country and are acting as a distraction from other areas of work they should be focused on.

On a much more increased exposure levels, social media can eventually harm individuals either financially or physically by acting as a catalyst. Academic fraud and cheating methods are often promoted or glorified across the platforms, while the easy exposure levels has given unverified sources and unqualified individuals to have an audience where fake products and information is made to propagate which can adversely affect the boundaries of the moral stand put forward by the government. The actual problem with this rise in misinformation and spread of fake news is that they are much harder to track down and taken an action against. Ethical standards are often times thrown out of the window for profit and clout as platforms such as "X" are notorious for allowing the spread of these fake and often hateful articles as they generate revenue. Social media is curated according to the interests and search histories of its users and recommend content, this may prove to the creation of an algorithm that voices opinions the same as the ones you hold and eventually tend to the creation of echo chambers and biased narratives that may have polarizing effects on the masses. These coupled with extreme political spaces and trolling can lead to the creation of a toxic and hostile online environment that may be taken advantage of by extremists group. Political parties and other corporates are also accused to paying influencers and for the creation of bots across platforms to propagate their ideas and increase their goodwill from what is considered neutral to an unsuspecting individual. Hate speech against minorities and inciting of communal violence are also on the rise due to the unsolicited and unmoderated use of social media with many

platforms often allowing these things due to their policy on free speech or due to the fact that some of these platforms are community moderated example being reddit.

Growing influence of social media in political discourse:

Political voices and ideologies used to be propagated and communicated using traditional media and outlet for a very long time. But the introduction of social media has lead to an evolution on how these are done in the present. This has lead to creation of untapped potential opportunities for political discourse as well as the development of very real challenges within the realm of political discourse

"Social media gives individuals the power to speak directly to large audiences without the traditional gatekeepers"(Piercy and Kiser, 2024) ^[53]. Social media has enabled the interaction of politicians and voters and thus reduce the gap between them through virtual space. It has also enabled the rise in engagement for parties during election periods so as to garner more goodwill." The voice of voiceless" is a popular saying that has emerged as a means to make the requests and needs of the minorities be more loud. Social media has enabled this to be true as it has enabled for the minorities and other groups to amplify their voice of concerns regarding the issues and problems they face. It has also enabled the de-institutionalisation of media as there has been an increase in the rise of freelance journalism and grassroots reporting from citizens which has forced the responsible authorities to take necessary actions. There are research revealing that due to the rise in social media around the world, people are getting information on different issues both domestically as well as internationally due to rapid dissemination of information in these platforms (Wike *et al.*, 2022) ^[70]. Young adults and teenagers are said to be having increased awareness regarding politics and how they shape their day to day life. (Wike *et al.*, 2022) ^[70]. Although social media has enabled the public in creating awareness regarding the politics, garnering the attention of authorities and elected personnel, influencing policies along with others, most do not think that they are capable of swaying the democratic working of their country or influence its working in any meaningful way (Wike *et al.*, 2022) ^[70]. Sweden is the only exception where more than 60% of the population think they can influence politics (Wike *et al.*, 2022) ^[70]. The major problem associated with social media use in public discourse regarding politics is the growing number of fake information which is also growing at an alarming rate and not enough proof or fact checking that is able to correct these already spread fake news. Even if these articles that are able to fact check this false information they are limited due to their smaller audience reach. (Piercy and Kiser, 2024) ^[53]. There is also a rise in concern regarding states sponsoring bots and accounts to reach a much wider audience and increasing their goodwill (Rubin, 2022) ^[56]. As social media's rise to popularity and implementation is a much recent phenomenon and the demographic that is mainly reliant on them are growing there is expected to be a rise in the number of people who are expected to receive information primarily through social media and it can lead to a great demographic shift within the political spectrum (Wike *et al.*, 2022) ^[70]. Social media echo chambers that are growing especially in the political discourse side can lead to polarization which can be explained by studying how group discussions, which are mimicked by social media in a virtual space, are the most

common way where people arrive at conclusions (Delaney, 2021) ^[17].

Media coverage has a lot of influence on voter behaviour. Sensationalised media coverage is no strange space within the coverage of politics. Usage of terms like “horse race” and “game state” analysis is the most common attention-grabbing usage of contents in the media. (Lucas, 2024) ^[38]. While these may be entertaining and hence more curated to the audience, which has been amplified tenfold with the emergence of social media, has not been kind enough towards the candidates as these are said to portraying candidates as self-centered and more concerned with their victory rather than being a good public figure and authority. (Lucas, 2024) ^[38]. As discussed above earlier, the propagation of discussions through social media can have increased exposure to political contents and discussions. This is very important as people who are generally not interested in politics and apolitical groups are also often bombarded with a barrage of information regarding the manifestos and promises and other vital information, especially during the last few days of the election. This can have a wide impact as it may be used to sway undecided voters and also prompt other apolitical individuals to finally decide what to do with their vote. As spread of false information is also rising during the elections campaign exponentially, there is a need to constantly on the lookout for this trending misinformation and the need to clarify the

news that may prove detrimental to the ones concerned. The consequences of not clearing up misinformation can negatively affect campaigns and potentially affecting election results (Wike *et al.*, 2022) ^[70]. There is also a need to identify and study the impact of influencers and other internet personalities during the election period. Before social media was a part of the day to day life, the most influential people, especially in India, used to be celebrities. But as the internet and social media group the world eventually became a much smaller space. Normal people have learned to voice their opinions and there has been a rise in niche internet personalities. But these content creators may not always be the best of credible source for any information. The potential misinformation from misinformed internet personalities coupled with the social media algorithm likely to feed your timeline with contents that are aligned with the users’ existing beliefs can lead to the creation of echo chambers and lead to polarisation and extremism regarding a particular ideology or intentions and also create a polarised public during elections (Tutella, 2023) ^[66]. Overexposure to certain news can lead to mental fatigue regarding the topic that is discussed at hand and hence political parties by carefully collaborating with party members and its campaigning department has been reported to utilize social media to make targeted messages for its supporters and leaning voters (Seymour, 2024) ^[59].

Country	Election Type	Date	Population (M)	Voter Turnout (%)	Govt. Change?	Misinformation?	AI Use?
Egypt	Presidential	-	111.85	-	Postponed	Yes	-
Algeria	Presidential	7.9.	45.26	48%	No	Yes	No specific evidence of AI use
Azerbaijan	Presidential	7.2.	10.11	76.70%	No	Yes	No specific evidence of AI use
Azerbaijan	Parliamentary	1.9.	10.11	-	No	Yes	No specific evidence of AI use
Bangladesh	Parliamentary	7.1.	172.08	41.80%	No	Yes	Yes
India	Parliamentary	19.4.-1.6.	1,422.06	66%	No	Yes	Yes
Indonesia	Presidential and Parliamentary	14.2.	276.39	82.39%	Mixed	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Parliamentary	8.2.	238.13	?	No	Yes	Yes
USA	Presidential and Parliamentary	5.11.	339.08	64%	Yes	Yes	Yes

Country wise data on misinformation and AI use in election campaigns (Berger and Freihse, 2024) ^[62]

The biggest and most influential leaders of all time have all used media in some way to garner votes and win campaigns. In the history of the United States of America, at different times different leaders have made use of social media to win the elections. Franklin Roosevelt’s use of radio and John Kennedy’s use of Television for the same are the most cited examples for the use of media for persuasion and winning election campaigns (*Social Media Influence on Elections | Maryville Online*, 2022). Even recently Trump has used social media, atleast an aspect of it to favour the result in his favour. (*Donald Trump: It’s Official Now: This Is How Barron Trump Is Helping His Father to Win the U.S Elections - The Economic Times*, 2024).

Another major reason that their impact should be studied is in order to understand their impact on traditional media such as Television, radio and newspaper. As social media’s rise in popularity led to the eventual and gradual downfall of traditional media, studying this shift helps in identifying the

evolution of how politics is communicated to the masses. Due to the spread of misinformation may or can lead to the interference in elections, social media service providers and government should study their impacts and must take preventive measures in order to prevent misinformation from affecting the results.

Transition from traditional media to digital platforms and their use in election campaigns

The methods that were used for political campaigns has undergone a vast transformation especially in the last decade or so. This transformation can be largely credited towards the rise in social media and data proliferation and analytics. To understand this transformation, it is important to understand the media landscape that existed in the country before the social media and by extension, digital media rise. The three major media back then used to be newspapers, television and radio stations. While newspapers

were much more focused on providing in depth and investigative reports, television was responsible for hosting debates between candidates and also among a selected representative group from the public. Radio stations were important in providing live updates to the happenings in the country. All three of these major media's were important in setting stage through selective coverage and facilitating an interaction between the voters and the representatives.

This was however a very limited way of engagement between the public and the representatives as it was heavily gatekept by traditional media companies and their interests and thus they were able to build upon their agendas through selective broadcasting and reporting. This is where the advent of the social media helped in making political discourse a much more open initiative. It has helped in fostering real time interactions and personal messages without the delay of other methods such as telegraphs and letters. This was along with the exclusion of the costs that were associated with the use of traditional media.

A great example for the use of social media in political campaigns is the use of these platforms by BJP for their historical win in the 2019 Indian elections. Prime Minister Modi was able to garner an image of a publically engaged leader even though he has never conducted a press conference in his tenure (Neyazi and Schroeder, 2021) ^[48]. This was an insightful event for everyone as it was the first time a prime minister has refused to use traditional media and instead relied upon digital media to promote his image.

The 2024 United states elections also used short form and longform content platforms to their advantage while also relying on traditional medias. The then Vice president kamala Harriss' campaign was focused on short form content platforms like tiktok so as to garner the attention and votes of a younger demographic audience by showcasing her party's liberal values (Murphy, 2024) ^[47]. While Donald trump focused on alt right content creators and popular male influencers to garner an image of a conservative and traditional man to appeal to the macho obsessed subset of the young adults (Murphy, 2024) ^[47]. His son, Barron Trump also helped in creating a positive

outlook on him through the use of podcasts *Donald Trump: It's Official Now: This Is How Barron Trump Is Helping His Father to Win the U.S Elections - The Economic Times*, 2024).

Coming back to the 2019 elections held in India, the role played by digital platforms were not just limited to enhance the image of Narendra Modi but is also a great case study into how they were able to advance their narratives (Jakesch *et al.*, 2021) ^[32]. The misinformation released during this election period against BJP's opponents were staggering as it helped in discrediting the opposition while at the same time positioned Modi as a national hero or "Chowkidar" that is protecting the people's interests against a corrupt political institution (Neyazi and Schroeder, 2021) ^[48]. Another great implementation of their networks and groundwork they did was to implement this campaign at a grassrootslevel with localized members of the family and also targeting other voters who were unsure where to vote with either disillusionment and fear mongering (Neyazi and Schroeder, 2021; Pons *et al.*, 2018) ^[48, 54]. Although this is accredited to the brilliant use of social media to further their agenda, the report conducted by Neyazi T and Schroeder R states that many people has lost trust on news that they receive from online media and especially social media like facebook and whatsapp (Neyazi and Schroeder, 2021) ^[48].

Microtargetting has also gained popularity within the political spectrum to further target voters who are aligned with a political party's ideology or atleast those who resemble an ounce of their beliefs (Borgesius *et al.*, 2018) ^[12]. Data analytics and collection of vast amount of data with the collaboration of service providers to create a vast databank relating to the profiles of the voters has enabled campaigners to make specific messages aimed at specific demographics inorder to garner their votes (Boak and Miller, 2024) ^[10].

As much social media is credited to changing the political spectrum within a country and within the international scale, there also has been a shift in the political approach and how and what tactics are making headlines and is DOIng the winning (Ly, 2023). There has been a

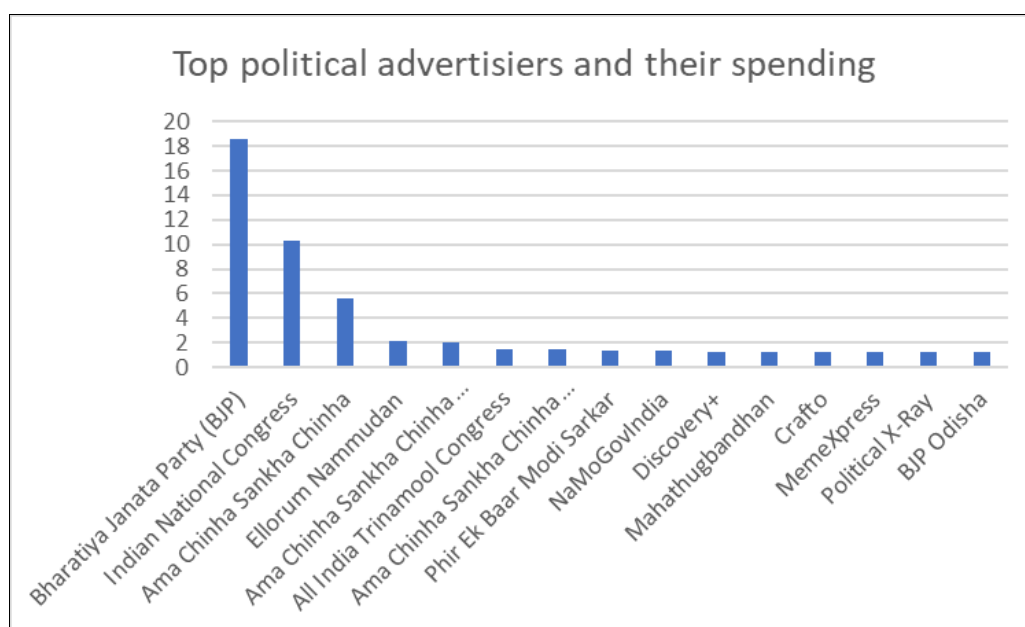


Fig 1: Top Political Advertisers And Their Spending

Various spending of political sections in India (Mukhopadhyay, 2024) ^[46]

Personalized politics targets various groups within the country, be it a majority, minority or even a large group that is having common interests (Huber, 2022) ^[30]. In the case of personalized politics, the right wing parties across the globe has used social media to target the emotional people by validating their emotions and giving them an outlet for their anger (Bennett, 2012b, 2012a) ^[8]. Search engine manipulation is one of the most coveted yet secretive method used while election campaigns were going on, this is especially evident in the 2008 US elections (Metaxas and Mustafaraj, 2012) ^[44].

Social media access and its wide use made it a main method for political involvement. This is true for swing voters and those not sure how to vote (Moslehpour *et al.*, 2021) ^[45]. These people may not search for regular news outlets. Different from old media, which needs effort to consume, social media sends political information to user accounts (Bakshy *et al.*, 2015) ^[6]. Algorithms shape this information to fit interests and actions. This shaping can show voters many viewpoints. These include campaign ads, candidate updates as well as content users produce (Guess *et al.*, 2023) ^[26]. All of this can form views in small or large ways. For swing voters they could already lean a certain way. This steady flow of information can make those feelings stronger or change them (Fournier *et al.*, 2023) ^[21]. It depends on the framing also how often the voter sees the messages. Without firm beliefs, undecided voters could find themselves affected by content (Nir and Druckman, 2008) ^[49]. It resonates emotionally or seems believable right away. Due to the speed of social media, campaigns can contact these voters in real time (Borah *et al.*, 2020). They can respond to new events or public feelings with specialized messages made to convince.

One of the major reasons social media influences swing voters is its ever-increasing manipulation of emotions. What sells on these platforms is engagement, whether that comes in the form of outrage, fear, hope, or something else (Serrano-Puche, 2021) ^[58]. And political parties, along with social media players, enable this by letting them attune their messages that resonate more on an emotional level rather than a logical or rational level (Hasell, 2021) ^[28]. Memes and other videos that focus more on highlighting strengths or weaknesses may have a lasting impact on the viewer rather than a straightforward speech as it may sound monotonous and boring in the current social climate (Harshavardhan *et al.*, 2019) ^[27]. Swing voters may eventually vote for someone with whom they share a common fear rather than with someone with whom they share a common ideology through these manipulative tactics (Garzia and Ferreira da Silva, 2022) ^[22]. This is egregious as they often simplify complex issues in order to garner more votes. These emotional pulls are more often than not amplified due to the nature of social media that creates echo chambers for more engagement among its audience, leading to a complete dissociation between the reality at ground levels and what's been portrayed in the social handles (Datta *et al.*, 2021) ^[16].

The major pitfall that occurs with this is that these swing voters and undecided voters may be exposed to misinformation and disinformation that usually spreads like a wildfire on these social media handles (Baribi-Bartov *et al.*, 2024) ^[7]. This majorly affects those off set of voters who are lacking in political knowledge and are prone to believing what is coming on their feed (Vegetti and Mancosu, 2020) ^[67]. An image, an out-of-context quote, or a

made-up story can alter the perception regarding a candidate, the issue they are raising, and their election campaign (Weikmann and Lecheler, 2023) ^[68]. This misinformation or disinformation can often appear in the feeds of unsuspecting individuals as grassroots opinions rather than hard facts, which may add to its non-existent authenticity, which may eventually lead to influencing a particular proportion of the population (Treen *et al.*, 2020) ^[65]. This is a dangerous precedent, as most of these viewers don't bother with cross-checking or fact-checking whatever they read or view on the online platforms, as the engagement and their view count may trick people into having a sense of trust due to widespread reach and that may lead them to believe this as the truth (Dubois *et al.*, 2020) ^[47]. As social media is a community and our personal content is curated through our engagement with our friends and acquaintances people who are susceptible to social cues may eventually tip to that one side where more engagement is reached through the interaction of their online friends. This leads to the formation of sentiment that is shaped through the amplification of content through social media, rather than something that is born out of genuineness. The clever use of sensitive issues and the tools provided by these platforms for reaching a wider audience, political parties can alter, dominate and sway discourse and perceptions in their favour (Gilardi *et al.*, 2022) ^[24].

Despite its growing influence and its ability to swing the votes of undecided voters in their favor, the power of these platforms are not absolute as these viewers are nothing but mere recipients of information floating around the vast web of the internet (Seipp *et al.*, 2023) ^[57]. Approaching news articles, related to politics and other sensitive topics with skepticism, cross-checking of information and seeking out perspectives from people in the opposite spectrum can result in the management of misinformation spreading across the net like a wildflower and help the users make decisions that are informed and wise. There is also a risk of viewers and other personnel who are exposed to this news to develop apathy and lead to disengagement from the issues due to the sheer overexposure to this content (Skurka *et al.*, 2023) ^[60]. The chances of voters developing a sense of indecision and perceiving the campaigns as too chaotic are also high with regards to the swing voters and undecided voter (Çakır, 2022) ^[15]. Social media is an opportunity for these offset of people to align or identify their stand with regards to some issues while also providing a challenge to find truth among an ocean of noise of misinformation and disinformation and they can shape elections in ways that can be termed as unpredictable to say the least (Aldayel and Magdy, 2022b) ^[1].

The most efficient method of limiting the proliferation of misinformation and reducing the manipulative nature of political parties in regards to their use of social media is through the implementation of regulations, especially during the election season (Aral and Eckles, 2019a) ^[4]. Some of these regulations includes the verification of political advertisers to verify themselves, reduction of microtargeting and maintaining transparency and a publicly accessible advertisement library (Borz *et al.*, 2024) ^[4]. The studies have indeed shown that there has been improved efficiency relating to the ads that have been published by verified sources and professional ad agencies, and political parties, but have proved inefficient in doing so in regards to the ones that have been user-generated and ones including memes. And the disturbing fact is that these memes and posts may be posting content by subtly distorting the facts or through the amplification of divisive narratives (Paz *et*

al., 2021) ^[51]. The hard part about moderating these posts is the fact that there are billions of posts made about different elections or issues happening consistently across the platforms on various cultural and linguistic contexts, which eventually overwhelms moderating systems of the most advanced moderation systems (Dosono and Semaan, 2019) ^[19]. This is due to the lack of nuance in these moderating systems which requires human moderators who are under-resourced, leading to inadequate application of such policies (Gorwa *et al.*, 2020) ^[25]. In India, the Election Commission enforces guidelines of model code of conduct during campaigns and how they should be conducted (McMillan, 2012) ^[41]. Legal provisions like section 66C of IT Act 2000 also provide further strengthening regarding the use of social media. However, due to the country's vast cultural diversity, it is almost impossible to monitor the infringements on these aspects (Madan, 2022) ^[30]. Legal frameworks that exist like those in India provide a strong foundation for accountability but their success is determined by their timely enforcement and maintaining a grip on the decentralized nature of social media without disrupting the integrity of the same. ECI has worked with platforms like X, Meta and google to ensure their compliance with following the ethical codes and the removal of unlawful content. Reporting of fake accounts and other grievances are taken into account through this method (Medzini, 2022a) ^[42]. There are certain challenges to enforcing digital transparency and accountability within the virtual space (Gierlich-Joas *et al.*, 2020) ^[23]. The sheer volume of the

content released far outpaces that of any traditional method of dissemination of information (Wong, 2019) ^[71]. This raises the most important question as to how these regulatory mechanisms work without undermining the democratic nature of social media and not being an outright censorship (Medzini, 2022b) ^[43]. The main objective in this regard is the distinguishment between what constitutes as paid unnatural content and what constitutes as organic content (Petre *et al.*, 2019) ^[52]. Granted many aspects within the organic content also need to be regulated. The major problem associated with this is that most political parties use proxies or "surrogates" for the propagation of information for their supposed advertisements, thus blurring the lines even further (Keller *et al.*, 2020) ^[35]. This is even more egregious when it comes to encrypted platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. There are reports suggesting that WhatsApp was a major hub for the conduit of rumours and hate speech yet monitoring was nearly impossible due to their strong encryption. (Resende *et al.*, 2019) ^[55]. Another complication that arises due to this is the enforcement issues that arise from the different national laws existing in different nations and the platforms operating globally (Blumenthal Johanna, 2021) ^[9]. Another issue that arise is the lack of proper resources when it comes to tackling these issues. Even a well-funded agency such as the ECI struggles, as the manpower and technical prowess required to tackle such as issue is an Everest task in of itself (Aral and Eckles, 2019b) ^[32]. Developing countries with even constrained budgets are facing even more of an issue.

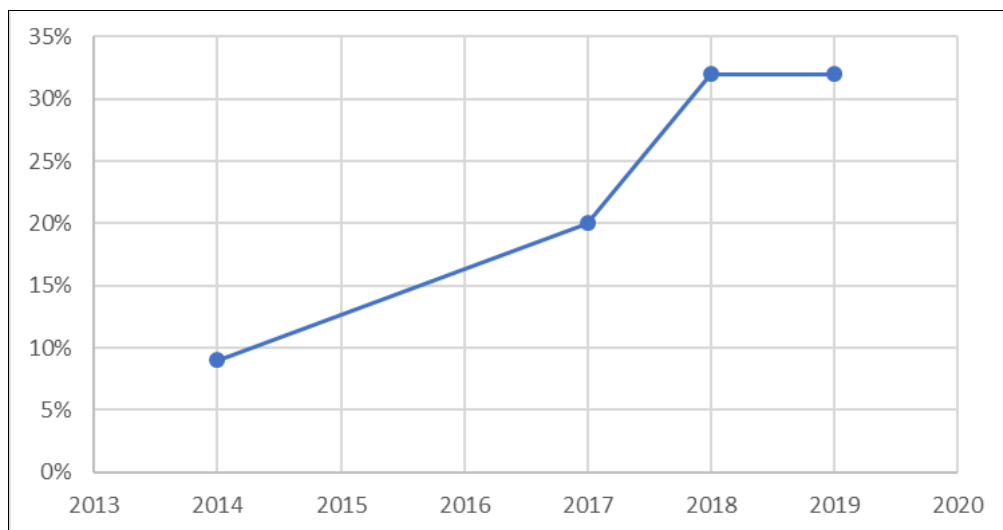


Fig 2: percentage of respondents using facebook

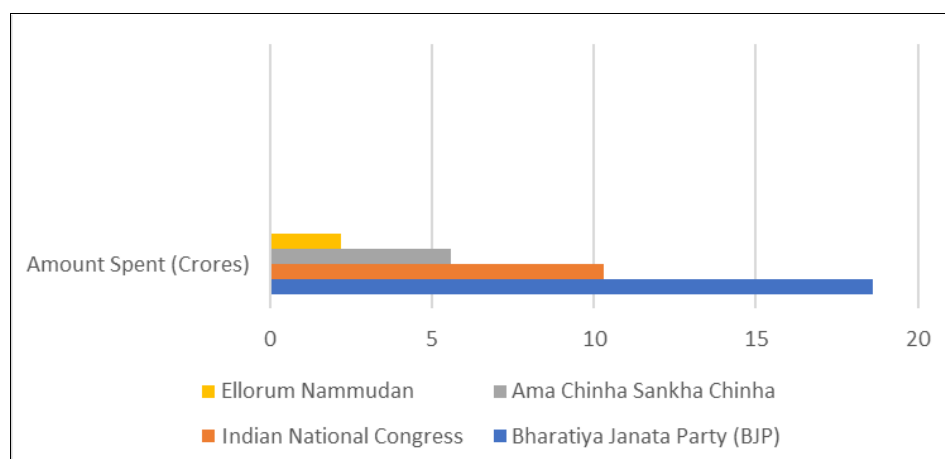


Fig 3: Percentage of Respondents Who Consume Traditional News Media

Conclusion

As explored in this review, the phenomenon of *digital echo chambers* lies at the heart of social media's complex influence on voter attitudes during elections. While these platforms have undeniably expanded political engagement and information access, they have also created fragmented digital environments where users are increasingly exposed only to affirming viewpoints. This reinforcement of existing beliefs, shaped by algorithms and exploited by targeted political messaging, contributes to growing polarization and distorted perceptions of political reality. Case studies from democracies like India and the United States highlight how social media can both bridge and deepen ideological divides, depending on its use. To safeguard electoral integrity and democratic discourse, it is imperative to address the structural factors behind echo chambers through stronger platform regulation, algorithmic transparency, and widespread digital literacy. Only then can the democratic potential of social media be fully realized without succumbing to its divisive pitfalls.

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